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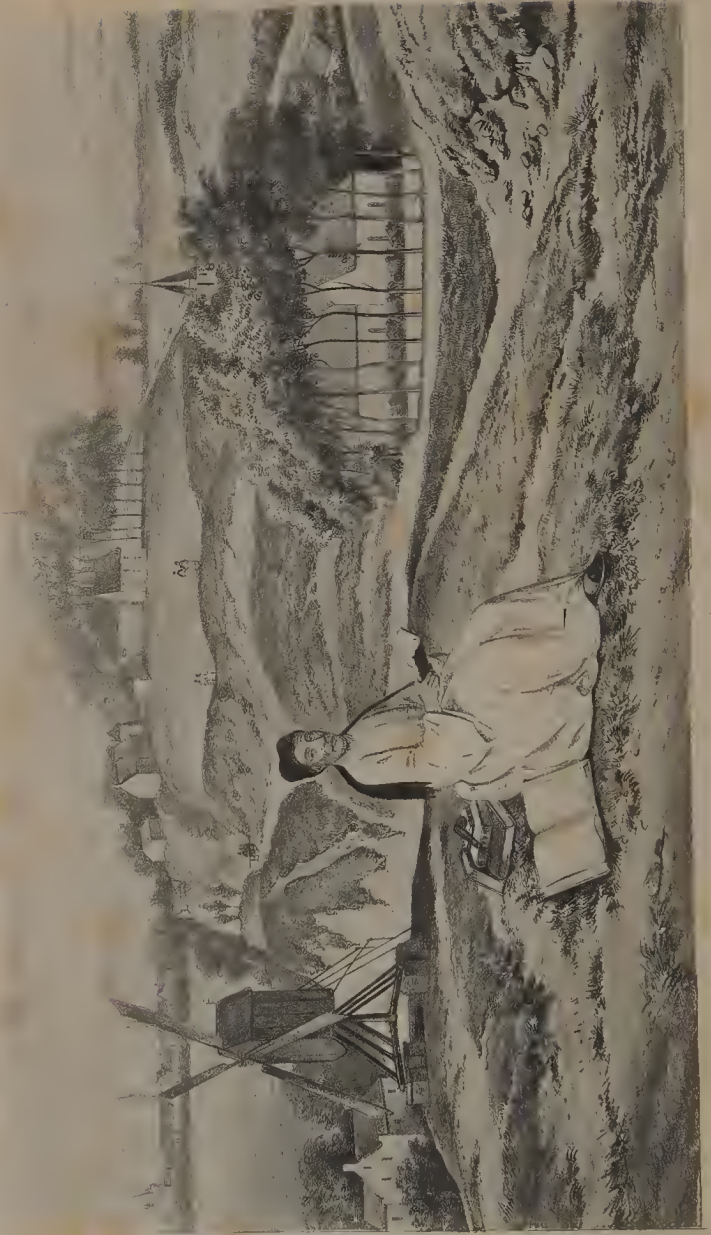


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THOMAS A KEMPIS

and the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes

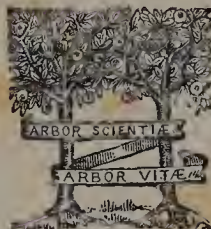
THOMAS À KEMPIS

AND THE

BROTHERS OF COMMON LIFE

BY THE

REV. S. KETTLEWELL



VOLUME II.

LONDON
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THOMAS À KEMPIS

WITH SOME ACCOUNT AS GIVEN BY HIM OF
THE BROTHERS OF COMMON LIFE

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As Thomas à Kempis came to live in the monastery at Mount St. Agnes within a short time after the Canons Regular, of which he became one, took possession of it, and the appointment of the first Prior, the matters concerning which he writes must have been recorded by him whilst the circumstances were fresh in the minds of those living there. Afterwards he writes respecting what he himself witnessed, or was concerned or took part in. I shall therefore give these chronicles, briefly and substantially, as they are related by him.

On January 18, 1398, the most Reverend Father Frederick de Brankenheim, the famous metropolitan Bishop of Utrecht, granted his license and authority to the devout priests Egbert of Linghen and Wolfard Matthias, and certain other persons—devout clerics and laymen—dwelling together in Mount St. Agnes in Nemel, near Zwolle, that, for the more fully promoting the glory of God and of holy religion, they might construct in some suitable and convenient place in the diocese, a monastery of Canons Regular, where they might worthily and devoutly serve God according to the rule of the Blessed Augustine.

The favour of this license having been obtained, they chose a place in the freehold of Westerhof, where they determined to build a monastery; for at first the Zwollenses would not suffer them to erect such a building on Mount Nemel, which, nevertheless, afterwards was accomplished by the favour of God. Egbert Mulart, therefore, a truly honourable and wealthy man, an armourer in Hasselt, a thorough friend of the 'devotees,' and a special patron of theirs, gave them some land in Westerhof. There they commenced to erect a church of very simple construction, and had it consecrated by Hubert, the suffragan Bishop. It was dedicated to the honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A cemetery was also consecrated at the same time. In the little church there were three altars, and when the high altar had been consecrated, the Bishop chanted mass in a solemn modulated voice.

Then in the presence of this reverend Father, and a multitude of the religious clerics and laymen, who were assembled together on this festive day, the first four of our Brethren, according to the mystical number of the four Evangelists, as the chronicler has it, were instituted by the venerable and religious Father John Wale, Prior of the Canons Regular in the city of Zwolle, who was especially called upon to undertake this office. The names of these four are worthy of being remembered, says the writer, by the Brethren who succeeded them. The first was Brother Egbert de Linghen, a presbyter, whom the Brethren had chosen three years before this to be their priest. The second was Wolfard Matthias of Medenblic, a venerable priest also. The third was John de Ummen, one of the first founders of the Brotherhood in the Mount, a native of Campen. The fourth was Deric Clive, from the city of that name. These four made their profession the same day, and when the Divine Mysteries were completed, they afterwards partook of bodily refreshment, and spent the remainder of the day in spiritual gladness of soul, amidst the abounding love of the fraternity. Brother Egbert was,

however, the senior in order and Rector of the House, until a new Rector came, who was selected by the General Chapter, and then this Brother resigned his office, and humbly took the next place after him. Some other devout clerics who were associated with them, but who as yet had not received the habit of the Order, were John Nicold of Deventer, Henry Huctinc of the same place—who were probably well known to Thomas à Kempis, if indeed they had not come from the very House where he lived—John Kempen, not John the brother of Thomas à Kempis, who is shortly afterwards spoken of; and one Herman Kempen, of the diocese of Cologne. This person, it would appear also, was not a brother of Thomas, but only a native of the same town from which he came.

After Easter in the same year, at a General Chapter held at Windesheim by the Fathers, they were received into the Order of Canons Regular, and the above-named Brethren, who had just been instituted, were enrolled and incorporated into the sacred fellowship of the body.

Mention is made in this part of the Chronicles by Thomas of a grievous pestilence that prevailed during the whole of the summer of this year in Deventer, Zwolle, and in the adjacent towns and villages, so that frequently in one day as many as from twenty to thirty bodies were interred in the parochial burial grounds of the towns. Very many of the devotees of both sexes died at this time. Father Reyner also, the priest of Zwolle, a truly pious and very compassionate man to the poor, died, as also his two assistant priests, who were unwearied in their exertions during this fearful time. There were many really good men, true saints of the highest order, who were taken to their eternal rest during this sad season.¹

Various obstacles and unforeseen events, it would seem, detrimental to the interests of the religious community, prevented the new monks with their Brethren permanently settling at Westerhof, where at the first they had taken up

¹ *Chronicon. Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. vi.

their abode. There had been much searching of heart and many consultations as to what should be done. They found that they should not be allowed to dwell there in peace, and that they would be subject to constant annoyances. The place was not so favourably situated as they imagined ; probably the outbreak of the epidemic had something to do with showing them that it would be an unsuitable place to live in. They sought the advice of the Chapter of Windesheim, the Archbishop was appealed to, and a change was eventually decided upon. So before the year came to a close they made preparation to leave ; the Archbishop of Utrecht granting them license to remove from Westerhof, and transfer themselves as opportunity offered, to Mount St. Agnes, since it was the very spot which promised everything for their welfare. He at the same time preserved to them all the rights and privileges he had himself aforetime conceded.

For the accomplishment of this their pious desire, and obtaining the object of their petition, they were much indebted, and especially grateful, to Conrad Hengel, the vice-president, or custodian of Zwolle. And that they might exalt the cross in Mount St. Agnes, they returned to the place previously occupied by them a little while before, where the greater number of their fraternity had lived with blind John de Ummen ; and here, at Mount St. Agnes, they prepared to lay the foundation of a monastery, not far from the Brother-house. The Archbishop also gave them a license to consecrate a cemetery for the monastery. The people of Zwolle were still, however, much opposed to the undertaking ; and when Hubert, the suffragan Bishop, was on his way to consecrate the said cemetery, and had got as far as Zwolle, the people would not permit him to proceed further on his journey to Mount St. Agnes until the deputies of the town had first had an interview with the Archbishop of Utrecht, with the design of wishing him to withdraw his sanction and license. On this account the consecration of the cemetery was deferred

nearly a whole year, which was a great trial of patience to the Brethren.

The reason of so long a delay appears to have arisen from the Archbishop being compelled at the time to take a journey to Rome. On his return, however, to his diocese, there went unto him certain of the Brethren, who earnestly besought him that he would confirm the license which he had given for the consecration of the cemetery, and to this petition he willingly consented. For not only did he issue a new mandate, but paying no attention to the querulous objections of their adversaries, he himself came in person to consecrate the place ; ‘ preferring,’ as Thomas à Kempis says, ‘ the honour of God, and the furtherance of religion,’ rather than yield to the unjust censures of worldly people, who often set themselves zealously to oppose the works of good men. Moreover, from that time he took the House on the Mount into special favour—giving it his entire protection and advancing its interests. And yet amid his widespread diocese, and the many places he had to visit, he afterwards seems to have forgotten the place, and what had occurred there. For on a certain occasion some while after, when on a visitation, and returning to Zwolle, he asked his attendant priests, while pointing to the buildings on the Mount, ‘ What is that place, and what kind of men live there?’ To which his chief Vicar replied : ‘ Is the place unknown to our beloved master? The place is your own monastery. That is Mount St. Agnes, where the Brethren of the Mount dwell.’ ‘ It is well, it is well,’ he replied ; ‘ may God preserve them.’

The chronicler then proceeds to give a short account of certain persons who died in the Mount, soon after the Brethren came there. He mentions a certain layman, John Faber by name, well affected towards the Brethren, who when seized with the pestilence at Zwolle came from this town, and for God’s sake entreated that he might be received. His petition was granted, but he shortly afterwards died. His reception, however, brought the infection

into the House, and several of the devout clerics and laymen were laid low with the same disease, and in a little time were withdrawn from this life. And yet, adds the writer, many more of those who were thus infected were restored to health again. Allusion is then made to two or three of those who were called away ; the last of those that died, he tells us, was John Nicholas, of Campen, the gardener. Herman Restikey, a cleric and a native of Kempen, who knew how to sing well and bind books, was also of the number who died.

Before naming the next I would observe, that many other young men besides Thomas à Kempis seem to have come from Kempen ; from which it would appear that some holy influence must have been at work there, stirring up these young men to devote themselves to God's service ; for here he makes mention again of a John Kempen, and this before his brother John came to the place, who fell asleep in the Lord. This man had been recently received among the 'religious,' and died before he had been invested with the Order. He had withdrawn himself from a secular life, and had been a 'sublector' in the town of Campen. 'Very much beloved was he in life and death ; both in the city and in the province by men of good report.' This John had for a long time been in God's service ; he was of a very kind disposition, temperate in eating, and much given to out-door occupations. In the time of harvest, when the community stood in need of more labour in the fields, he heartily assisted them, and sometimes in the night time, when he had finished his daily duties, he would help the poor to gather in their standing corn ; and frequently fatigued himself in works of charity. The same year in which he died, being a long rainy season, he was under the necessity of gathering the corn out of wet places, and carrying it in his hand to some higher ground where it could be dried.

John Wickbold, of Deventer, was another of those who died here ; he had for a long time been known in Zwolle for his devout conversation ; he was a keen (*avidus*)

lover of the Scriptures, and edified many by his sacred discourse.

On the vigil of St. Thomas the Apostle, Gerlac, a cleric from the town of Campen, died. He had only the same year left the world and his parents, and entered the monastery; these were buried in the Chapel of St. Agnes, which afterwards became the chapter-house; because as yet there was, owing to the delay alluded to a little before this, no ground consecrated for interments. Here their remains were laid on account of its being contiguous to the plot which they expected would shortly be consecrated. Then in the year 1407, when William Vorniken was made second Prior of the monastery at Mount St. Agnes, their bones were disinterred, and buried again in the new cemetery which had then been consecrated. It was situated on the west side of the church, where they had already buried several lay-members.

Just previous, however, to these re-interments which the chronicler was led to notice, an important event among others took place, which somewhat affected the life of Thomas à Kempis; and this was the promotion of his brother John by the Chapter of Windesheim to take the oversight and charge of another monastery, and, by consequence, his departure from Mount St. Agnes. This afforded Thomas the occasion to give some account, to which reference will shortly be made, of what was done by his brother during the time he was Prior. One other particular, however, must first be briefly noticed, as it has a relation to a person evidently belonging to the birthplace of Thomas, and in whom consequently he must have felt a more peculiar interest.

Towards the close of the chapter the name of Godefrid Kempen is mentioned, as having been instituted on the festival of Pope St. Gregory, and that he wrote and sung well. This man, Thomas also tells us, wrote out a Missal for the high altar and for the choir, illuminated numerous books, and also painted and adorned the walls of the Sacramentarium most beautifully with the images of saints.¹

¹ *Chronicon, Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. vii.

Previous to the election of the first Prior in Mount St. Agnes there had only been a Rector, or temporary governor. After Easter in the year 1398,¹ therefore, the chronicler proceeds to say: Brother John à Kempis, on being elected Prior, came from the convent of Windesheim to preside over the house in this place. He was the first Prior, and by the help of God he strenuously and religiously governed this settled House, containing a large and poor family, nine years. He also commendably promoted the welfare of the monastery, as much by taking part in the building of it, as in copying such books as were required, and discharging other necessary duties. He built the greater part of the walls of the church, and prepared most of the wood needful for the roof. He undertook the planting of an orchard of fruit trees at the southern part of the monastery, and constructed an arbour of trees. This was the very place which Gerard the Great had some little while ago designed for a garden, where they were to plant their herbs and vegetables, and this had been done, for here formerly fine wheat had been grown. It would appear from what follows that there were several elevated spots round about much higher than are now to be seen in this part. For, continues the chronicler, during his (John à Kempis's) time, mountains and hills were levelled and the low valleys filled up. Thus, in truth to the very letter, he says, was fulfilled that which we read of in the book of the prophet Isaiah, which was often quoted by the Brethren in relation to what was done: 'Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places

¹ Occasional errors occur in the printing of these Chronicles, which from time to time cause a difficulty; and there is evidently one here with regard to the date; for the year when John, the brother of Thomas, was chosen to be the first Prior, must have been in 1398, and not in 1399, as it is printed, or he could not have presided over the House nine years. Two or three similar errors occur in the dates of the expulsion and return of the Brothers. In a conversation I had with a learned priest, who was familiar with the Chronicles, and had translated one of the works of the Brothers of Common Life, he informed me that I should find several mistakes in it. Some attention has therefore been needed to avoid falling into them.

plain.’¹ It is difficult to say with how much labour and sweat this mountainous and sandy place was extensively reduced and rendered abundantly fruitful.

Thomas, though much more occupied with copying books, which brought in an income for the Brethren, than in out-door labours, was a constant eye-witness of these toils, for, as it will be seen, he took up his abode in the monastery within a year and a half after his brother had been made Prior. Much and continued toil was required to bring the surrounding lands into proper order and cultivation. As an example of this, when preparing a place for the cemetery and church, because a greater mount than elsewhere stood in that part and occupied the whole circuit, it was in a little while through divers means reduced to a plain, the soil having been carried beyond the boundary to a deep valley on the north side, so that to the admiration of many, scarcely a vestige of the mount appeared. The idea of preserving the picturesque beauty of the neighbourhood, by retaining the higher elevations of land does not seem to have entered into their calculations ; their purpose was how to make the spot most useful and subservient to the purposes they required. The chronicler, Thomas himself, is fond of bringing in quaint illustrations or elucidating what was done by a reference to the Word of God ; so here, when speaking of the labours of the Brethren, in alternately working at this undertaking, he observes, ‘ The discourse of the Lord is true where He said, “ If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove ; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” ’² But as faith without works is dead,’ he continues, ‘ so we firmly believed, that if we put our hand to the work in the name of the Lord, we could quickly transfer the mountain to another place, and this was fulfilled not only with regard to this mountain, but respecting others in the neighbourhood of the monastery.’

Upon this spot he (the Prior) constructed the necessary

¹ Is. xl. 4.

² Matt. xvii. 20.

buildings: a refectory for the Brethren, a refectory for the lay-brothers, a kitchen and buttery, and cells for their guests. A sacristy for the divine things was also constructed between the choir and the chapter-house. We cannot but remark how much this good brother of Thomas à Kempis resembled such men as Felix Neff, and Oberlin, whose lives were so memorable in keeping alive the truth of the Gospel in a dark and persecuting period, by the preaching the Word of God and sowing the seed of divine life in the hearts of those around them, whilst at the same time they were the foremost in undertaking outward labours for the general good, and not ashamed of appearing as workmen among their fellow-men; so did John the Prior and his Brethren appear among the lay-brethren and workmen with the trowel or the hod in their hands or on their shoulders, or with the spade or the hoe in their hands, when engaged in the fields; moreover the Prior was to be seen among those that laboured in the making of pots from the clay, or digging out the earth and throwing it into the cart. In his leisure hours, however, he occupied himself in reading sacred books, and often engaged in writing and illuminating manuscripts. He wrote many books for the choir and for private use. And, the chronicler adds, because the community were as yet poor, he directed that some of the Brethren should write out these books at a low price, as it had been the custom from early days. On this account many of the Brethren studiously occupied themselves in their cells, whilst the others diligently laboured at various out-door employments.

In giving the early history of the place previous to his coming to Mount St. Agnes, the chronicler has been led somewhat to forestall the current of events; I now therefore come back to the time when Thomas à Kempis entered the monastery. After alluding to the apostolic indulgence granted by Pope Boniface IX., which has been already named, in favour of building anew the Church of St. Michael at Zwolle, and speaking of himself as having gone to Zwolle for the purpose of participating in the said in-

dulgence, he tells us that he thence proceeded to Mount St. Agnes, and eagerly intreated that he might have an abode in that place. The words in the Latin are: 'Eodem anno ego Thomas Kempis scholaris Daventriensis, ex Dioecesi Coleniensi natus veni Zwollis pro indulgentiis. Deinde processi lætus ad montem Sanctae Agnetis, et feci instantiam pro mansione in eodem loco.' The Indulgence was conceded early in May, but was not completed till the feast of St. Michael and All-Angels, to whose honour the Church was dedicated. Thus nearly five months intervened, and it was probably not till after the latter date that Thomas proceeded to Mount St. Agnes. And the insertion of the above passage relating to the occurrence in the very body of the chronicle, is ample guarantee that Thomas à Kempis was the writer of it. The 'Ego' identifies him with it. He then alludes to the admission of another Brother shortly afterwards, on the feast of St. Barbara the Virgin. This was William Henric, a native of Amsterdam, who till this time had been maintained by the devout clerics at Deventer; so Thomas must have known him, if indeed he had not come from the same House where he had lived whilst there.¹

Shortly after Thomas à Kempis had entered the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes, he must have heard the sad tidings of the death of his beloved master and father in Christ, Florentius, and probably he, with a number of other Brethren from the monastery, attended his funeral; but of this we have no clear account.

Another event that occurred about a year and a half after this, and which leads to a most interesting account of the individual, is the death of Wolfard, one the first of the Brothers who were instituted, and a priest of the House. The account is thus given by Thomas. 'In the year 1401, on the feast of the Martyrs John and Paul,² there died in

¹ *Chronicon Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, ch. viii.

² *I.e.* on June 26. These two martyrs were put to death by Julian because they would not renounce the Christian faith. A church was afterwards built in Rome to their memory.

the monastery of our Order, which is called the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Wood, near Northorn, Brother Wolfard Matthias of Medenblic, a town in Holland. He was tall of stature, quick in his walk, eloquent in discourse, comely in his grey hairs, and constantly aiding the labours of the young men. He also engaged in many lowly deeds, as washing pans and pots in the kitchen, digging the ground, carrying stones and collecting wood. It was his wont to be early in the choir ; he was prompt in watching, strong in fasting, diligent in celebrating, and devout in prayers. Being asked on a certain occasion by a "religious" what he might eat during Advent, and whether he might not sometimes have an egg, he replied, "Blessed be God, I have rarely taken an egg or a piece of fish during the whole of Advent, but I have fasted, and been well content with our pottage (*pulmentariis*)."

When, therefore, according to the good pleasure of God the end of his life was drawing near, and good actions meetly adorned him with higher graces, he arrived at a most happy end on this wise.

'There was at this time of the year a remarkable pestilence in our Monastery of the Blessed Virgin in the Wood. The Prior of that place had been taken ill with it and died, and so had many of the Brethren, and there was only one priest, John Groningham, left in a most desolate condition with a single novice Brother, Honestus. Our Brother Wolfard, hearing of the deaths that had taken place, and the lonely state of the two remaining Brethren, was greatly moved with compassion for that House. And it came to pass on a certain day, when he was girding himself for labour, he spoke to me (Thomas à Kempis) whilst standing near, in these terms of condolence :—"O who is worthy to have a portion with the good Brethren of Northorn, and to have such a departure from the world !" For he was well acquainted with several of them, knowing the place and warmly loving their holy society. Soon after he had spoken many excellent things concerning them, presently Brother Arnold, a *conversus* from Northorn, approached the door of our monastery for the purpose of

asking the aid of one of our priests. Brother Wolfard seeing him, came to him, and gladly offered himself for this very object—delighted with the opportunity of going thither. For no sooner had he learnt the reason of Arnold's coming, than he professed himself ready to go at once with him if it should please the Prior ; he therefore sought, and obtained his permission.'

Arnold, rejoiced and moved by his promptitude, said, 'O how good it is of you, most beloved, to go in this manner!' The consent of the Brotherhood must, however, first be had. An assembly of them was therefore immediately called, and the matter discussed, as to who should be sent to succour the Brethren at Northorn in their dire necessity. Brother Wolfard's desire was brought forward, and, though advanced in years, it was seen from his manner that he was wishful to undertake the business out of his exceeding love ; and the matter was accordingly thus settled. 'And,' continues the pious narrator, 'rising at the dawn of another day, he went forth with Brother Arnold to Northorn to give his life for the Brethren, after Christ's example, that he might save it in eternity. And bidding farewell to the Brethren, whose eyes were dimmed with tears at his departure, he left Mount St. Agnes, never to return thither again, or to see those from whom he had just parted, for he knew not how soon he would be transferred to a higher mount. Thus he overcame nature by relinquishing home and brethren, and fulfilled the law of charity in imitating Christ in His death. For, having entered the Monastery of the Blessed Virgin in the Wood, he himself was shortly afterwards seized with illness and died within a short space, and was buried beside the Brethren of the monastery who had died as aforesaid.

'Brother Egbert related to me,' adds Thomas à Kempis, 'that a long time ago Gerard the Great had said to our Brother Wolfard, "You will have two conversions." And thus it was. For in the time of Gerard he began to have a desire for good things, but after awhile was drawn back again to the world. At length, after many years, he was,

by the grace of God, filled with deep compunction, and leaving the care of his farm to others, he changed his earthly life and assumed the habit of the "religious" with the first Brethren, and closed his last days in a happy struggle.'¹

The above account, though it is recorded later on in the Chronicles, has been inserted before the particulars which follow, because it falls in better with the current history of the place. We now return to give an account of the Brethren who were invested with the Order of Canons Regular by the first Prior, John à Kempis, which includes that of his brother, Thomas à Kempis, in the seventh year of his entering the monastery.

Whilst this venerable Prior lived at Mount St. Agnes, there were seven clerical and three lay Brethren² invested on the days and years severally written below. He also undertook to 'profess' Godefrid de Kempis, who had come from the same town, and had been a very near neighbour. In the year 1401, on the day for the commemoration of the Dispersion of the Apostles, Brother John Drick, of the city of Steenwyck, in the diocese of Utrecht, was invested. This man had aforetime been the priest and Vicar of Steenwyck, and was professed on the Nativity of John the Apostle, within a year of his probation, having received the license of his superior the Prior, and was afterward made 'Procurator.'

In the same year, on the feast of St. Brixius, Bishop and Confessor, Brother William Henric, called Coman of Amsterdam, was invested. He was about twenty-three years old. This man before coming here had lived with the devout Brethren at Deventer, and had been sent on hither by Florentius, whilst the latter was still living. He must then have been well known to Thomas à Kempis,

¹ *Agone felici. Chronicon. Mount. St. Agnes.* chap. xi.

² *Conversi.* They were properly those who became monks as adults, not those who had been trained in a monastery from their early years. About the eleventh century, according to Mabillon, 'Conversi' came to mean the lay-brothers. See *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, by Dr. W. Smith and Prof. Cheetham, vol. i. p. 458.

having entered the monastery a short while previous to his doing so. Such notices as these are evidences of how much the common life was happily combined with the monastic in this new movement for a reformation of such Houses. The community at Mount St. Agnes more resembled that of a Christian family, where all the members are of one heart and one mind, and live together in holy love and under a religious rule, than the dead and dreary, if not dissolute life, which the monks of those days sometimes led in the monasteries.

In the year 1402, on the vigil of the Nativity of Christ, Brother Gerard Tydemann de Wesep was invested. This man wrote many books for the use of the House, and for sale.

In the year 1403, on the festival of the Martyrs of Pontianus, Conrad, a hoer from the company of 'Marcha,'¹ was invested.

In the year 1405, on the festival of the Coronation,² Brother Alard, a priest, and Brother John Benevolt de Groninghem were instituted.

In the year of our Lord 1406, on the day of the Sacrament,³ which in that year occurred the day before (or on the vigil of) St. Barnabas, two clerics and one lay-brother were invested, viz. Brother Thomas Hemerken, of the city of Kempen, in the diocese of Cologne, own

¹ The chief or head of this company was the Marquess, a title of honour in Germany, and who by his office had to look to the marches and the boundaries of his country. See *Dict. Cambridge*, 1693.

² If this did not refer to the anniversary of the coronation of the temporal ruler, it probably alludes to the festival of the four martyrs, Severus, Severianus, Carpophorus, and Victorinus, who suffered martyrdom at Rome for the faith of Christ in the reign of Diocletian. This day is called the 'Coronati Quatuor.' See *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, ed. by Dr. W. Smith and Prof. Cheetham, vol. i. p. 461.

³ In the year 1264 Urban IV. published a solemn edict instituting this festival to be observed annually in honour of the Holy Sacrament, or rather of the *real presence* of Christ's Body in that sacred ordinance. It is frequently called CORPUS CHRISTI feast-day, and was kept on the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday. There is a college both at Cambridge and Oxford so named. See Mosheim's *Ecl. Hist.* iii. 261, who gives some account of the origin of it. Corpus Christi Day was that year on June 10.

brother of John Kempen, the first Prior, whose father was called John, and his mother Gertrude.¹ Also Brother Octbert Wild, of Zwolle. Also Brother Arnold Droem, a lay-brother from Utrecht, who brought many good things to the monastery, and was the 'Refectorarius.'

This 10th of June was a day ever to be remembered by Thomas à Kempis, and was afterwards always kept with great solemnity and devout thankfulness of soul. With more than ordinary devotion did he observe it, since on these anniversaries he 'renewed the dedication of himself by an earnest and joyful confirmation of his most solemn vow to follow Christ steadfastly till death, and endeavoured by his manner to express his utter contempt of the world, and his thankfulness also, by praises for so special a grace bestowed upon him, glorifying God in the deepest acknowledgment of his own demerits and of the Divine goodness.' In treating of the Apostolic saying, 'Ye see your calling, brethren,' &c., he thus makes allusion to this important event in his life at the end of his 'Soliloquy of the Soul.'² Addressing God he says :

These things I consider in myself, who, contemptible and useless in this world, have been snatched by Thy holy calling from its shipwreck, and have been found worthy to be united with Thy college also, to serve Thee.³

And that I might not go back again, I *freely bound myself with a vow*.⁴ And this I attribute not to my merits, but Thy Providence.

And for this do I praise and bless Thee, that Thou hast called me by Thy grace, given me a good will, and cast away from me the burden of sins.

¹ The passage is of so much interest that the Latin is here subjoined. 'Anno Domini MCCCCVI. in die Sacramenti, quæ tunc fuit in profesto Barnabæ, investiti sunt duo fratres clerici et unus conversus; frater Thomas Hemerken de Kempis civitate, Diœcesis Coloniensis, germanus fratris Joannis Kempen primi Prioris, quorum Pater Joannes, Mater Gertrudis vocabatur. Item,' &c. *Chronicon Mont. St. Agnet.*, chap. x.

² Badius Ascensius draws our attention to this in his *Vita de Thom. à Kemp.*, chap. xii. sec. 3.

³ 'Et ad serviendum tibi, etiam tuo merui sociari Collegio.' *Soliloq.*, chap. xxv. sec II.

⁴ 'Voto me sponte constrinxi.' *Ibid.*

For Thou hast put me under Thy sweet yoke, softening my mind with the unction of Thy Spirit, Whom the world knows not, nor sees, nor understands.

Preserve this will, O merciful Lord, and increase the gifts of grace, as long as I am in this visible light.

I know that this calling is a great benefit, which is not given to all, but to those for whom it is prepared of the Father, since it is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy, so that every mouth that speaketh vain things may be stopped, and man be wholly subject unto Thee, and that no flesh may glory in Thy sight, nor claim for itself any of its own merits or good works.

Before I add the remainder of this sweet psalm of thanksgiving, which is well deserving of a place in these pages, I would here introduce the very form of the vow by which Thomas à Kempis bound himself, and to which he alludes in the above words, that the reader may perceive the character of it, and more clearly understand with what frame of mind he entered upon the life of a Canon Regular of the St. Augustine Order. It is found among his writings, and though it is stern in its requirements and enters into more minute particulars than may be thought needful, there is a fervour and quaintness about it which will repay the perusal of it by those who will view it in a right spirit, according to the word of Christ, who said, 'He who loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me,' and 'So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.'

THE FORM OF HIS RENUNCIATION is as follows:—

O Lord Jesu Christ, my hope, and my sole refuge, the delight of my life, and the guide of my ways, I do this day renounce all things that are in the world for the love of Thee. And this I long to perform to the honour of Thy name. I renounce, in the first place, all my friends, parents, relations and kinsfolk, all that are near and dear, known and familiar to me. Also all cities, towns, castles, castellanies, and country seats, with all mountains and valleys, rivers and fountains, fields, meadows, and woods, should they at any time be mine, or be offered to me: all ornaments, rich household stuff, ple sant and magnificent houses: all psalteries, harps, organs, worldly music, songs, garlands, perfumes:

all merriments, clubs, banquets, conversations, visits, salutations, favours, honours, delights of men : all buffooneries, noises, humours, plays, jests, wanderings, excursions, tumults, useless occupations : all riches, goods, emoluments, properties, charges, offices, dignities, solacements, recreations in the world, and all whatsoever either the flesh can be tempted to, allured and delighted with, or aught by which the spirit may be hindered, molested and defiled.

II. This day, moreover, I make choice of Thee, my God and Protector, as the Governor of my life, the Provider of all things necessary for me, the Comforter in all my sorrows, anguishes and temptations, as also in all my toils, wherein I am obliged to labour all the days of my life, for the love of Thee, and the salvation of my soul. Thou art my refuge, my home, my city, my habitation : Thou art my food, Thou art my drink, Thou art my rest, Thou art my refection : Thou art my beloved Companion, my intimate Friend, my nearest Relation and Kinsman : Thou art to me Brother and Sister : Thou art Father and Patron, Thou art the Shepherd and Guardian of my whole being, to Whom I faithfully commend myself, with all that is mine, because there is no salvation out of Thee, nor safety of life but with Thee.

May therefore Thy Spirit, O Lord, be upon me, and may Thy grace ever accompany me in all things. May Thine Eye also be upon me by night as well as by day ; and may Thy hand always protect me both in prosperity and adversity. Vouchsafe also to lead me in the straightest way to the house of the habitation of Thy glory, where I may praise and bless Thee for ever, world without end.¹

In such words as these did Thomas à Kempis register his vow to renounce the world with all its pomps and vanities, and to dedicate himself wholly to God. There was no telling what changes and chances of life might turn up in his favour—what freak of fortune, with its bewitching wiles, might happen afterwards to tempt and allure him from Christ and from a life of poverty with Him, which he desired and resolved should be his, whatever might arise ; and he, therefore, once and for all time, cut off the possibility of his ever accepting any worldly position or fortune, so that his mind and affections might be kept clear and unmolested by the very thoughts of them, that he might

¹ *Opera de Thom. à Kemp.* 'Orationes Piæ,' Prima.

never be tempted to think or lust after them, or wish to have any delight in them; but that he might be solely Christ's, and that Christ might be all in all to him in this life so long as ever he lived. The vanities and delights of the world often draw men away from Christ and His service, or lead to the entanglement, defilement or distraction of their souls, even after they have resolved and vowed to serve Christ; and Thomas à Kempis would not that it should be so with him, or that there should be any possibility of it, as far as he could help it, and therefore he shut out every chance or occasion of it.

This vow was made in private between God and his own soul, probably in his cell, after much prayer, fasting and serious thought. His public profession and vow of obedience properly followed after, as the seal and sequence of the dedication of himself to God his Saviour. No one was allowed to be invested in any of the monasteries connected with Windesheim without the sanction of the General Chapter. The ceremony was much as follows. At the time when the investiture took place the candidate was called into the presence of the Prior surrounded by the rest of the brethren. And upon his coming, he was first to prostrate himself before them, and was then asked to produce the faculty for his being received into the Order; which being read aloud, he was interrogated as to whether he would in all things dispose himself to act faithfully as a member of the sacred congregation which he was about to enter. He was then required to sign with his own hand the deed of his profession, which in Thomas's case was according to the subjoined form:

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

In the year of His birth 1406, and on the day of the Sacrament, I Thomas of Kempen do hereby profess my steadfast resolve and the conversion of my ways, and obedience according to the Rule of St. Augustine,¹ before God and the whole Heavenly Court, in the presence of the Reverend

¹ 'Stabilitatem meam et conversionem morum meorum et obedientiam secundum Regulam.' See *Statutæ cap. de Windes.* A.D. 1508.

Father John, and other Fathers and Brethren of this Congregation of Canons Regular, under the aforesaid Rule. In surety thereof I have hereunto subscribed my own hand with the year and day above written.

They then proceeded with service of the Mass, when the candidate received, according to custom, the Holy Sacrament of Christ's Body, as if to ratify in the most solemn manner the important step he was taking, and to seek grace to enable him to fulfil his sacred profession to which he heartily and voluntarily bound himself. Mass being over, he was to be conducted to the steps of the altar, and with an audible voice he was three times to say, 'Receive me, O Lord, according to Thy loving kindness; O let me not be disappointed of my expectation.' Then followed certain other ejaculations, or versicles, in which probably all the brethren joined; then, 'Lord have mercy on us; Christ have mercy on us; Lord have mercy on us;' and the Lord's Prayer. After the invocations the new Canon was to proceed to the right corner of the altar, and with a loud voice make the usual oath, after this manner:—

I, Brother Thomas, do promise, by the help of God, perpetual continence, poverty, and obedience to thee as Prior, and to thy successors canonically instituted according to the Rule of the Canons Regular, and according to the decrees of the General Chapter.

Whether before or after, there seems to have been this further promise given to the Prior personally:—

'O Reverend sir, I promise obedience to you in what is good unto death.'¹

Having descended the steps of the Altar, the new Canon shall again prostrate himself, and repeat aloud three times these words:—'Confirm this desire in me, O God.'

Then after a solemn pause for private prayer, upon rising from his knees, he shall receive the kiss of peace

¹ 'Reverende Domine, promitto vobis obedientiam in bono usque ad mortem.'

from the Prior and from each of the Brethren present in the choir, and then retire to his place in the monastery.¹

Concerning the state of religious obedience upon which he had solemnly entered, several allusions are to be found in his various writings, in which he frankly commends it, and sets forth its value when rightly observed. One or two examples may suffice. Thus in that best known and most prized work of his, the 'De Imitatione Christi,' he says:—

It is a great matter to live in obedience, to be under a Superior and not to be at our own disposal. It is much safer to obey than to govern.

Many live under obedience rather from necessity than from love; such are discontented and do easily repine. Neither can they attain to freedom of mind unless they willingly and heartily put themselves under obedience for the love of God.

Go whither thou wilt, thou wilt find no rest but in humble subjection under the government of a Superior. Many have deceived themselves, imagining to find happiness in change.²

Again, in another part of the same book, we have these words:—

Thou must learn to renounce thine own will in many things, if thou wilt keep peace and concord with others.

It is no small matter to live in a monastery, or in a congregation, and to hold thy place without giving offence, and to continue faithful unto death.

The habit and the tonsure profit little, but it is a change of character and an entire mortification of the passions, that make a true religious.³

And once more, in another book of this same valuable work, we have a further reference to this state, where we have these admonitions as if from Christ:

¹ See the *Statutes of Windesheim*.

² Book I. ch. ix. The word 'superior' is twice used in this quotation, but in both cases it is taken from the Latin *Prelatus*. And the words even 'than to govern' in the original are, *quam in prelatura*. I note this, because, as I have elsewhere stated, it is the term which à Kempis often uses in his other works, when speaking of the superiors of their monasteries.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. xvii.

My son, he who endeavours to withdraw himself from obedience, withdraws himself from grace ; and he that seeketh to have things for his own particular benefit, loses those which are common.

If a man does not freely and willingly submit himself to his Superior, it is a sign that his flesh is not yet brought into perfect subjection, but oftentimes resists and murmurs.

Learn then quickly to submit thyself to thy Superior, if thou desirest to keep thine own flesh in subjection.¹

These words come very suitably from one who was living in a monastery, and had fully and heartily entered into the spirit of the conventual life, and the humble subjection of himself ; but they do not well apply to one who, though an ecclesiastic, was not bound by monastic vows, and who mixed in the world and in the controversies of the times, according to his own will, as Gerson, the Chancellor of Paris, did, for instance ; and the extracts which we have just given from the '*De Imitatione Christi*' plainly imply and assure us that the author of the work must have been a person in the position in which Thomas à Kempis was ; and, taken along with a variety of more direct evidence, they form a strong corroborative testimony in support of the assertion that he was the veritable author of the work.

I will now take up the remainder of that hymn of praise, found in his '*Soliloquy of the Soul*,' with which he was wont to commemorate this momentous event of his life ; in which, while acknowledging the goodness of God, he endeavoured to strengthen himself to persevere amidst the future trials that might await him.

Hadst Thou dealt with me according to righteousness, I should ere now have been cut off with those who are in hell.

But Thy goodness, O Lord, spared me, and Thou gavest me opportunity of pardon, that I might not become like the son of eternal perdition.

I am bound, therefore, to render Thee praise for so great a benefit ; and I would that I could repay Thee in worthy words and deeds all the days of my life.

¹ Book III. ch. xiii.

And I entreat Thee to receive as an act of Thanksgiving my very poor devotions with which I desire to serve Thee, and which out of love I owe ; so that the bounden duty of my service may radically proceed from and finally tend to Thy good pleasure and honour ; and that my heart be never turned away from Thy love :

But may my soul and body alike flourish and continue in Thy most holy service, as long as there is any breath within me, and I remain in my right mind and am able to remember Thee.

May Thy praise never cease out of my mouth, nor the abundance of Thy benefits depart from my heart.

So that if Thy servant, should live many years—supposing he were to live a hundred or a thousand years—yet will he not on that account be lukewarm, or kept from serving Thee in humility and subjection :

But I will serve Thee as willingly and devoutly as in that hour and day when my heart was first touched and strengthened¹ by Thee, that I might follow Thee, the only Lord, with a pure and entire mind.

Nor shall the intervention of any infirmity or adversity hinder this my resolution, but as I now feel, and in Thy hearing, O my God, I propose, so also by Thy help I desire to fulfil what has once gone forth out of my lips.

But, nevertheless, if this resolution be broken through frailty or any fault—since there is no man who liveth on the earth so righteous as not to sin—I will neither despair, nor let Thee go :

But I will forthwith bend the knees of my heart, with much contrition and tears ; offering to Thee my sorrowful and wounded conscience, that Thou mightest heal it with the medicine of Thy grace, and establish my purpose more strongly than it was before.

I will not repent of my good enterprise ; nay, I will rather give thanks, forasmuch as by Thee I have been enabled to undertake this, that I willingly consented to fight for ever under Thy banner.

After this devout soliloquy, in which he seeks to establish himself in his holy estate, he offers up this beautiful and earnest prayer :—

Oh ! Almighty and merciful God, Who createdst me out of nothing, and Who foreknewest from the beginning the frailty and fall of man, Thou art powerful most graciously to pardon all my transgressions, and to supply all that I have left undone :

¹ *Confirmatum.* It is said that Thomas here alludes to his *Profession* and solemn engagement to serve God under the rule of St. Augustine.

To restore all that I have lost, to heal the diseased, to purify the unclean, to enlighten what is dark, to bring down what is lofty, to rekindle the dead life :

To rebuild what is broken down, to recover what is lost, to correct what is depraved, to level the rough places, to restrain my curiosity, to recollect my scattered faculties : to compose the disorder of my being, and to change the whole condition of my mind for the better, so that nothing may be wanting of my solemn engagement formerly made : but that every occasion of evil may now co-operate for good to me, who lie humbly prostrate at Thy feet.

Lo ! this change is of the right hand of God Most High ; this His heavenly visitation ; this the manifold bestowal of His Divine compassion !

Accept also for a Thank-offering all the devout services of Thy Holy Church, with the unanimous concord of all the heavenly court.

And may all the saints from the beginning of the world, who have been enlightened and called by Thy grace, and all the Faithful, and Christians in every people, and tongue and nation, who now are, and have been before us, and shall be after us, celebrate together and praise Thy sweetest and most glorious Name, which is blessed above every name.

Let them again and again repeat with intense joy the universal praises worthily due to Thy name. Let them repeat them as many times as there are stars in the heavens, fishes in the sea, blades of grass on the earth, or letters in the Bible.

And when they have done all this, and humbly spoken for me, I will then confess to Thee that even yet they have fallen short of Thy ineffable praise :

The which I would fain magnify with all my strength, and exalt above all, until I attain to those heavenly praises, which the voices of men are not able to reach, nor set forth.

And then, once more resuming his soliloquy, he concludes in these words :

Seest thou now, O my soul, the greatness and preciousness of the benefits of Thy Creator and Redeemer, the Lord thy God, Whom all creatures are unable sufficiently to thank.

The which He created for the glory and praise of His Eternally Blessed Name, Who verily needs no glory, for that He alone is alone sufficient for Himself, Who Himself is His own glory.

Behold from the very multitude of His benefits, I could not

set them all before thine eyes, but out of many I have chosen three precious gifts, after the manner of the Magi when they offered to the Lord ; and in them all the rest may be included.

For every benefit, if thou considerest, is either of Nature, Grace, or Super-excellence, and whatever else there is may conveniently be referred to one of these three.

In *Creation* thou hast the benefit of Nature ; in *Redemption*, of Super-excellence ; in *Justification*, the gift of Grace.

For all and each of which, Glory be to Thee, O Holy Trinity, One coequal Deity, as it was before all ages, is now, and shall be for all Eternity. Amen.

In the above passages, in all of which à Kempis reveals much of his inner life, I have only given the words which come under the head of the *third benefit*, which he speaks of as ‘*the grace of Justification*, whereby (addressing God) Thou mercifully drewest me to conversion and amendment of life ; bestowing upon me the repentance of sins, the hope of pardon and the resolution to do well and serve Thee faithfully for ever.’ What led me to the mention of this third head first was the allusion in it to the dedication of himself afresh to God when he was made a Canon Regular, which was then under consideration. But what is noted down in the former part of this manual of thanksgiving, especially respecting the two other benefits, clearly forms part of his spiritual history, and should not be omitted : and, as it will be very acceptable to the devout Christian, I purpose to give what he says respecting the other blessings he received from God, in the remainder of this chapter. Beginning with the text, ‘Blessed be the name of the Lord for ever,’¹ he proceeds :—

Let whatever I do, read, and write ; whatever I think, say, and understand, be to Thy service, O Lord my God. Let all my works begin from Thee ; be carried on through Thee ; and be ended in Thee.

What Thou hast given, do Thou receive the same : and whence the rivers rise thither let them return.

Never is it better with me, never is it sweeter, than when I sincerely pay all back to Thee, whatever good is done or thought of by me.

¹ Ps. lxxii. 19.

I would fain return thanks ; and that I truly do, when of everything given and received I ascribe all to Thee, and nothing to myself. What return can I, a wicked and slothful servant, make ?

My service is nothing, though I do all that Thou hast commanded. I am therefore reduced to nothing, and truly humbled.

It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me, that Thou alone mayest be justified, Thou alone praised by all ; and that vilest dust may never more glory in itself.

Nevertheless, I will not desist, for I desire to praise Thee with heart and voice ; because, though I cannot do it worthily, it is yet wrong to be silent altogether, and not acknowledge it. Thou, my God, art my praise ; my song is always of Thee.

O how would he who knew but a little of Thy glory, and what it is to glory in Thee, regard as nothing all the blandishments of external glory ! O how quickly would all earthly delights become bitter to him who had tasted but a little of Thy sweetness !

O how would he burn who had received but a little spark of Thy love ! for he would most gladly despise all things, that he might be allowed to cleave unto Thy love.

And whatever he could do and suffer for Thy love would be truly sweet and easy. O how he would rejoice, how fervently run after Thee, mindful of all Thy benefits !

Nothing would he seek after with more affection ; nothing would he possess with greater satisfaction ; nothing would he more eagerly follow, than that he might be a slave to Thy love.

For by loving, he would not feel the burden, because love would carry all burdens. And therefore those who complain of the burden, show that they are but little advanced in love.

To serve Thee from love is most pleasant, and a solace of labours. Love looks not to its own advantage ; nor fears to suffer inconvenience, but seeks Thy good pleasure in all things.

The words in this part will remind the reader of that impassioned acknowledgment of the wonderful effects of Divine love, in the fifth chapter of the third book of the 'Imitation ;' and is, if we except the inspired penmen, one of the most noble tributes paid to its singular influence. And the words of Thomas à Kempis in this thanksgiving seem to come but little behind it. Continuing the glorious theme, he says :—

O how sweet a thing is Thy love, O Christ ! how pleasant does it sound ! how delightfully does it enter ! how strongly does it hold and bind fast !

Oh ! that it would perpetually bind me to Thy service, and wholly take possession of me : that it would subject me altogether to itself, and make me belong wholly to Thee.

For then I am most free, when captivated by Thy love, and deprived of and estranged from all that is my own.

I am Thy servant, O Lord : Thine, I say, because Thou hast bought me. I am willingly Thine ; and I am not ashamed to be Thine peculiarly.

I would not be mine own : aid me, that I may be set free from all that belongs to me.

Do thou excite and inflame ; do Thou kindle the fire, and my heart shall burn, and become pure, bright, and pleasant ; because Thy love banishes all vice, and consumes all sin.

Do Thou bind me fast with the chain of love, and my poor service shall stand.

Nor am I ignorant that my service brings no benefit to Thee ; but yet it is of no small advantage to me, to do what I know to be pleasing to Thee.

Would that I could do it, and not keep silence ; that I could speak and not conceal Thy works. For when can I be worthily sufficient to meditate upon all those benefits which Thou hast conferred upon unworthy me ?

Thou hast shown great mercy, O Lord, unto Thy servant ; but I alas ! have not rendered thanks to Thee, as Thou hast richly deserved.

And therefore pangs and sorrow of heart take hold of me, because I cannot repay Thy benefits, which are so many and so great.

Would that I could even once return thanks to Thee worthily and entirely for them all.

But what can there come out of him in whom there is nothing ? An empty vessel contains nothing to drink.

What then shall I do ? It behoves me to do something, because no one ought to appear empty before Thee ; for everyone that is ungrateful is displeasing to Thee.

O that I had anything in all the world which I could offer Thee, and that would be acceptable in Thine eyes ! What wilt Thou have, Beloved Lord ? Though Thou doubtless hast no need of my goods.

Why demandest Thou an offering from me ? None is richer than Thou ; and dost Thou yet require something from me ?

‘ I would ’ (Thou sayest) ‘ have Thee wholly. For this is expedient for thee, if thou wouldest gain My grace.

‘ I will give grace, and thou shalt return Me thanks, and thus we shall preserve mutual love constantly between us.

‘ Give thyself to Me, and thou hast given all.’

O Jesus, the Fountain of all good, the Fountain of Life, the Fountain of Grace, the Fountain of sweetness, the Fountain of Eternal Wisdom, most mercifully pour down upon me, now, the gift of heavenly grace, and teach me ever to thank Thee, and to give myself up to Thee above all, because this is the dearest offering I can make.

I understand this, and do fully consent to it. Receive me, behold I am wholly Thine, and all mine is thine. One thing, however, there is that I cannot give Thee.

‘ What is that ? ’

My sin, which is my own, and is not therefore to be imputed unto Thee. The sin is mine, and every failing in me is to be attributed to myself alone ; but glory and giving of thanks to Thee for all Thy benefits.

Here the reader might have looked for some acknowledgment of that great truth that Christ had come to take away our sins, that ‘ He who knew no sin, was made sin for us,’ and bare them in His own body on the cross for us. A Kempis seems to have led up to this point, and an opening for the subject was made. Why, then, did he not gladly embrace the opportunity ? It is difficult to say, for the omission is so pointed ; and yet further on, as will be seen, he speaks of our redemption through Christ, and of His being the only Saviour, in the most glowing terms. It cannot therefore be that he would slight or overlook the essential doctrine of the Atonement. Far from it ; it is not to be thought of. And the only solution that presents itself is that, finding, if he entered upon it here, he would pass over another main theme of thanksgiving, which ought to come in first, he suddenly breaks off, as if he had recollected that he must proceed in some order with his subject. And this would seem to be the case from what

follows, for in commencing one of the most sublime hymns of praise, he says :—

But now I recollect myself to mention a few of Thy benefits out of many, and such as chiefly move me, and are eminent. For time does not suffice, nor thought avail, to search through them all.

Their number is beyond measure, their greatness overpowers the understanding, and their worth is above all price.

For they cannot be bought, because they are freely given, and therefore thanks only are required for them ; but all will be taken away from the unthankful.

FIRST then, I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, Creator of all things, that Thou hast vouchsafed to create me a man endued with reason, and constituted above all the works of Thy hands, to have a soul made after Thine own image and likeness.

This first and great benefit was given me of Thy free goodness, for I made not myself, but Thou madest me, introducing me into the world by the parents whom Thou madest to serve Thee herein.

And behold I am more excellent than any other body, being preferred above all beasts and fowls of the air, because, made after the image of God, capable of eternal wisdom, I am naturally a partaker of uncreated light and unchangeable truth.

For everything, then, that I am, for life, and understanding, I return Thee unceasing thanks ; wishing and praying that all creatures also which are in heaven and earth may ever praise Thy wonderful and super-exalted Name.

I bless Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, Who hast created all things out of nothing by Thy Only Begotten Son in the Holy Spirit.

Of Thy pure and free will, and not from any necessity, Thou createdst all things to make known Thy power to the children of men ; and hast arranged this visible world in the very best way, through Thy invisible Wisdom, coeternal with Thee.

Let all Thy creatures, obeying Thee in all things, and being made serviceable for the human race, bless Thee.

For at Thy command the heavens give rain at fitting seasons, and the earth brings forth in abundance.

The sun and the moon shine brightly upon the earth, and the stars move in order in the night seasons.

The fountains are full, the rivers flow, and fishes of divers kinds swim in the waters.

The birds of the air fly and sing, the goats, fawns, and stags skip on the mountains.

Sheep and cattle rejoice in good pastures, and different animals run through the groves.

The meadows are green, the plains flourish, and the trees of the wood put forth leaves and fruit.

These are Thy works, O God, Who alone doest great wonders.

This is an exceptional instance in which *à Kempis* alludes to the bounties of the natural world, yet his admiration is not of them independently, as they are in themselves alone, but as the handy-work of a beneficent Creator ; for in them he alone beholds the wisdom and goodness of God. It is a sweet and grateful canticle to the supreme Lord of all ; and what follows is no less so, since the tender emotions of his soul are stirred to utterances of most devout thankfulness and sacred beauty.

The SECOND benefit shown to me is the mystery of the Incarnation, the work of Redemption, and the price of our Salvation, the fruit indeed of Thy Passion and Death.

O great work of mercy ! O work of most excellent charity, of greatest humility, and of singular patience !

This, man deserved not ; this, none of the Angels could accomplish ; this, Prophets wondered at ; this, Apostles saw and taught ; this, all the faithful received ; this, the elect do chiefly delight in and honour.

This benefit, fully considered, excites longings, inflames the heart, nourishes devotion, enlightens the mind, cleanses the affections, attracts to heaven, withdraws from the world, leads and unites the soul to Christ.

This gift is superabundantly greater than the former, yet One hath given and accomplished both, Jesus Christ, our Lord God.

For it were no advantage for me to have been born into the world had I not been redeemed by the price of His Blood.

Grace then came to my assistance, Divine mercy was increased and plenteous redemption was made ; for when nature was corrupted, it could not be repaired without the aid of the Creator.

O Father of Mercies, and God of all consolation, Thou deliveredst up Thy Son that Thou mightest redeem Thy condemned servant.

O, wonderful is the greatness of Thy mercy towards us, which

neither the reason of men nor the understanding of Angels can unfold !

O sweetest Jesus, beginning and end of our salvation, Thou alone knowest how Thou alone couldst bring help to the wretched and condemned.

For Thou deignedst to appear among men in the most humble and abject form of a servant, and from pitying love alone receivedst the sentence of dire death for mortal worms.

O Jesus, Fountain of goodness and mercy, Light of Eternal Light, and spotless mirror of the Majesty of God, inflame my heart while meditating on this ineffable benefit, which Thou wilt to confer on me and on all the world.

This benefit is general as was the first, sufficient for the salvation of all ; but yet not producing fruit in all, because of the unbelief and wickedness of many.

But it is saving and profitable to all the elect, for whom all things were created, and recreated by Thee, O Jesus Christ.

O good Jesus, how many benefits didst Thou bestow upon us in Thy humanity !

Thou wast made our brother and our flesh, that we might be accounted sons of God, and have access through Thee to the Father, Whose offended Majesty none could appease but Thou, concerning Whom He Himself said, 'This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.'

Happy is the soul that diligently calls to mind, vehemently loves, and worthily venerates the sacraments of our Redemption, and renders thanks to Thee for all, and trusts more to Thy will than her own feelings.

For no man by himself is able to investigate this mystery, nor is it grasped by human wisdom ; but rather by the strength of faith, and the intuition of a pure mind enlightened from above.

Blessed is he who is accounted worthy to receive through grace what the wise men of the world have not been able to understand through nature.

O Jesus, Wisdom of the Father, make me to understand in the light of faith, this great and wonderful mystery of Thy Incarnation.

Because in this all the sweetness of our salvation lies, the greatest love abounds, and the fulness of Thy unsearchable wisdom shines forth most gloriously.

Let Thy servant advance more and more through the increase of virtues, and the performance of good deeds, and more and more be instructed in the memorable secret of the Incarnation,

with that profound mystery of Thy sacred Passion, and altogether drawn onwards to Thy inmost heart.

The exhibition of so great a love and mercy is a very deep abyss, and as it were a divine sea which cannot be swum over, yet in which the spiritual fishes, both small and great, whom Thou hast inclosed in the net of faith, swim to and fro.

Let then such great love and sweetness, such great humility and kindness live in my recollection : and may somewhat of the mystery of the Incarnation and Passion appear, and be intermingled in every sacrifice of prayer and exercise of devotion, that it may be offered as the purest frankincense and the sweetest balsam with a rich odour to God the Father !

Let all those who have been redeemed by the Lord, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy, now sing with me a song of Divine praise, and render a hymn of heartfelt jubilation, with thanksgiving !

And let all the angels standing round the throne fall upon their faces, and adore the Lamb of God Who took away the sin of the world, saying, Praise and honour belong unto Thee, O Lord ! To Thee be ascribed blessing and honour, thanksgiving and the voice of praise, power and dominion, majesty and wisdom, to Thee, our Lord God, Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Amen.¹

It is only needful to add that this form of thanksgiving composed by à Kempis was kept by him for his own use as occasion required, and was probably so used by him, when he yearly commemorated, as his wont was, his reception into the Order of Canons Regular. It helped to refresh his soul, and supplied him with suitable words also wherewith to come before the Lord, whensoever he might feel so oppressed and heavy in mind that he could not lift up his soul to God as he desired to do ; while at the same time the remembrance of the fervour of his first devotions found in the words above would help to reincite and resuscitate his drooping soul to seek after a closer walk with God.

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, cap. xxv.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The interior life of à Kempis after being received into the Order of Canons Regular—Three phases of spiritual experience—First, his great fervour and delight in the Devout Life—His meditations on the sweetness and consolation to be found in God—His ardent aspirations after God as his chief good—Then, secondly, a season of darkness and distress of soul—His relation of what happened—His inquiry into the matter—His acknowledgment of God's dealings with him—An account of what Jesus had personally done for him.

THERE are two kinds of lives, to one of which all men are more or less inclined. The one is the outward life, the other the interior ; or, to adopt the language of Scripture, there are those who live and walk after the flesh, and do mind the things of the flesh ; and there are others who live and walk after the Spirit, and do mind the things of the Spirit. The one acts upon the other, and determines the character of the man in a most subtle and mysterious manner ; and therefore it is of the utmost moment to choose and resolutely determine which to follow. And it must be borne in mind that the life of Thomas à Kempis exemplifies in a special degree the interior life—the being *spiritually minded* ; heeding what the Spirit of God suggested to him, instead of attending to the solicitations of the flesh. It was a life in which—whilst diligently and faithfully pursuing the duties of his outward calling in life, and the vocation in which he excelled, whilst fulfilling all that was rightfully required of him by others—he paid special attention to the cultivation and development of his spiritual existence, sought above all things to do the will of God from the heart, and to follow a hidden life with God through Christ Jesus. And no account of this saintly character would be complete, or would give anything like

an adequate idea of the man, unless our attention was drawn to this, and we could be informed in some definite manner respecting the particular characteristics of his spiritual history—what was the state of his mind, what the trials and struggles of the inner man, what the outpourings and breathings of his soul, and how his faith and love were exercised and drawn out during the earlier part of his devout career at the monastery of Mount St. Agnes.

And it is fortunate that for the next twenty or thirty years from this time, we have what may be considered abundant evidence of his pilgrimage and growth in grace, and his advance, through severe probations and searchings of heart, to the stature of a more perfect man in Christ—much more than what there is during the last thirty or forty years of his life ; though he seems ever to have lived, to the end of his days, as one to whom an entrance had been given by faith into the unseen world, and who constantly lived under the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit.

I have already endeavoured to give some instances of this, in the various changes that befel him, and before proceeding with other particulars from the Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes, I must direct the reader's attention to other movements in the spiritual life of Thomas à Kempis. For it must not be supposed that from the time when he was received into the Order of Canons Regular he remained in one uniform, settled frame of mind—that he enjoyed an uninterrupted calm and undisturbed peace of soul. It is true that à Kempis was not of those who had fallen deeply into sin and been alienated from God, and had then been converted and had turned to Him in earnest for the first time ; for from his youth up he had—though with many shortcomings, of which he himself was conscious—constantly sought the favour of God, and endeavoured to walk in His ways ; yet did he experience such changes, analogous to what those do who turn to God from a wicked life, though somewhat different ; for he turned to Christ again with fresh bonds of love and devotion ; he

had sought Christ, and tried to follow Him, he had loved Christ, and been attached to Him, but now he had espoused Christ, or rather Christ had espoused him by a personal seal or union, that was never to be set aside. Hence, though he still pursued the same path or direction as before, it was a new step in the devout life, an onward movement of peculiar significance that he had taken. And it is with these various changes to which he was subject during this period of his religious career that I have now to deal.

A few divines of former days, as well as of later times, have noticed and made mention of three phases or conditions of soul, through which spiritual-minded persons are often carried in their progress towards Christian perfection, and in which the wisdom and guidance of Divine grace is discernible, as an education or discipline necessary for fallen man, in moulding him for what God would have him to be, and fitting him for His more immediate presence in glory. It was one of the sayings of Gregory the Great, that 'Every convert had a beginning, a middle, and a perfection ; in the first there is sweetness to allure him ; in the second bitterness to exercise him ; and in the third fulness of perfection to confirm him.' In the first of these stages the soul experiences the joy of its espousal with Christ ; the man is made sensible of the Infinite Love bestowed upon him in fuller measure, drawing him closer to Its bosom, enfolding and gladdening him in Its blessed embrace. And this inexpressible sweetness and fervour of soul which pervades the man with holy rapture, and often with an ecstasy of delight, is doubtless designed by the mercy and goodness of God to draw onwards the awakened convert, or one who gives himself to God afresh in some solemn compact in the path of holiness, to strengthen in him the newly formed resolutions of devotion to God's service, till he has gained some hope and confidence in treading the narrow way of life. This conscious tasting of the Divine favour and loving-kindness is a wonderful help to such souls, since it carries them through the many difficulties, hindrances,

and peculiar temptations which are apt to beset them in their early endeavours to live a new and closer walk with God.

And then when such an one is somewhat established in grace, and feels able to hold his ground against the enemy ; nay, often at the time when he thinks that he shall never be moved, but be able to stand fast in the Lord like the strong mountains, another change comes over his soul : the time of trial and probation comes, when all joy and delight in religion seem gone, and the light of God's countenance seems withdrawn ; and this comes that he may know himself more thoroughly and intimately, his own weakness and proneness to fall and come short, and his constant need of God's help and presence. To this end he is brought as it were into the wilderness, dreariness surrounds him, and he feels a kind of desolation within himself. This is a season of sore distress, when God for a wise purpose causes him to pass under the rod, that he may be strengthened and exalted by discipline, and being purified, like gold tried in the fire, he may come forth from the Divine ordeal more meet for the Master's service, and more precious in His sight. The man is unable to account for the deep depression of mind that possesses him—the dryness of soul, the fears, and doubts, and perplexities that come upon him ; and he feels as if his faith and hope in God were small and vanishing away—as if God were leaving him to himself ; and then comes the pleading with God, the hungering after Him, a deep longing for the consciousness of His blessed presence again. During this season of trial, the soul enters into herself, and inquires if there be not some cause for this ; and beholding her own vileness in the sight of a holy God, her own helpless and lost condition, she is led to humble herself before Him, to cast herself entirely on the mercy of the Blessed Saviour, and after many a heart-yearning cry, learns patiently to wait for light and comfort, for pardon and grace. With some this season of trial lasts longer than with others. God alone knows and decrees after what sort the process shall

be, and how long it shall last ; for the character of souls, and the training for each, necessarily differ much. But in due time, and often imperceptibly, it comes to an end, and the soul gradually recovers its vigour and hope in God, and comes forth more beautified and established in grace than before.

The soul is then entering upon a third and final stage of her history, when a more settled frame, a more heavenly calm, a more abiding peace takes possession of her. There may not be that exuberance of fervour, that ecstatic delight which was once enjoyed, when she first consciously knew God, or when God graciously drew the soul nearer to Himself, and gave it a foretaste of how gracious He is to those who truly seek Him. But there gently steals over the soul a sweet serenity, as it were, of a blessed Sabbath, when God brings the soul into that rest which remaineth for the people of God, and which some do enter into even in this life, though the fulness of the blessing is reserved for the life to come. There is a feeling that the storm is over, that the deep waves that have gone over the soul are left behind ; a consciousness in the individual that he has been brought into the haven where he would be, under the defence of the Most High, where he can in future quietly remain at anchor, secure in some degree from being tossed to and fro by the tempest that will still arise in the world outside. There is a happy recovery in the soul as from sickness ; a restoration to new life again, a fresh and more enduring reconciliation with God, that begets an unshaken confidence in Him, and a rejoicing in hope to the end.

Now Thomas à Kempis appears to have passed through these three stages to which I have just drawn attention. Some allusion is made by his biographers to them, and we find sufficient evidence of them in his writings, especially in his ‘ Soliloquy of the Soul,’ that valuable repository where à Kempis records the various emotions and experience of his spiritual history, from which I have already largely drawn. Our attention is directly turned to this work, for, alluding to the second of these conditions of his soul, his

contemporary biographer says, 'therein,' that is in the 'Soliloquy of the Soul,' 'it may be seen how he sat solitary and kept silence ;' and further on, 'because he was acceptable unto God and found favour in His sight, therefore it was necessary that he should be proved by many temptations, exercises, and humiliations ; that he might afterwards know how to help others in the like state, and to prescribe them such a remedy, as he had often experienced in himself and in others. And this accordingly he did, both in his oral discourses and in his written treatises.'¹ I shall therefore again refer to this work for examples of what I have advanced respecting the threefold experience which à Kempis had. For though, as it has been before stated, he endeavoured to conceal himself from the outside world, that they should not know who it was of whom these things might be said, yet are we assured by one in whom we may confide that in these writings he gave expression to the sentiments and effusions of his own soul—that he desired and endeavoured, without making himself publicly known, to instruct others by his own experience ; and would teach them how to deal with their own souls, how they might seek God and find Him for themselves, and how they might attain to a higher degree of Christian perfection, by means and ways which he himself had tried and found so profitable. It is not difficult then for us to learn what from time to time transpired in his own soul, the changes observable in his spiritual state as he was ripening in the Divine life, and how he was eventually brought to a more tranquil, steadfast, and immovable condition, wherein he enjoyed the love and peace of God unto the end of his earthly pilgrimage.

And in introducing several of his papers at full length here and there, in order to gain a clearer view of the very complexion and features of his soul during the changes he underwent, I would have the reader to bear in mind that he has before him no mere ordinary words on religious subjects, such as he may find in a thousand books ; for though

¹ *Opera Thom. à Kemp.* Nuremb. edit. 1494, fol. lxxxvii.

the words are simple and easy to be understood, yet are they especially calculated to produce on the mind of one who enters into the spirit of them an impression of lasting good. For there are few since the days of the Apostles, whose words have exercised a greater influence upon Christian life than those of Thomas à Kempis ; and whose teaching has carried a peculiar force with it, to those who have attentively and reverently received it.

In considering then the first experience of the soul alluded to, we have but to place before us for a moment à Kempis's state of mind. He had just been united to the King of the whole earth by a solemn compact ; he felt now in a special manner, which he endeavoured fully to realise, that he belonged to the Lord of life and glory ; and that He, this blessed Jesus, the King of saints, had a special affection and tender regard for him also. Christ has a love and regard for all flesh, but for those who love Him in return, and become His with their whole heart, it is only reasonable and likely to expect that He will bestow upon them a special love and regard. À Kempis was conscious of this, and had learnt from the Incarnation that God was in Christ, making Himself known to man, making a way of approach, as well as reconciling the world, to Himself.¹ Here was the Being Who as man he could in some measure comprehend, Who had all the affections and feelings of a man ; Who could love and sympathise and care for him ; and to Whom he could look, upon Whom he could centre his affections, to Whom he could direct his prayers, and with Whom he could hold sacred converse ; and Who nevertheless, being God also, could be present with him at all times, as if there were none other but himself, was able to succour him, listen to him ; Whom he could adore and worship with the profoundest reverence as the great and mighty God, the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, Whom to know was life eternal, and Who would never fail or disappoint him. Christ was, in short, 'all in all' to him, as He was to His Apostle St. Paul.

¹ See *Conciones*, the first part on the Incarnation, by à Kempis.

‘Father to me Thou art and Mother dear,
 And Brother too, kind Husband of my heart.’
 So speaks Andromache in boding fear,
 Ere from her last embrace her hero part—
 So evermore, by Faith’s undying glow,
 We own the Crucified in weal and woe.¹

But the words of à Kempis will unfold to us more clearly what he himself experienced in the rapturous devotion which at one time and another overflowed his soul ; and there is much instruction regarding the interior life to be gathered from them. Starting then from the passage, ‘All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto Thee?’ his soul thus breaks forth in fervent tones, sometimes speaking of Jesus, sometimes speaking to Him.

He is One, and there is none like Him ; He is my God, and everyone in comparison to Him is nothing.

My best Beloved, and most faithful Friend ! Who never forsakes anyone who loves Him, but willingly associates Himself with His lovers.

And if at any time He hides Himself, and suffers one of them to be straitened, He does not do this that He may cast him away, but that He may prove, purge, and instruct him.

Therefore, He does not then altogether leave him, but even the more wisely teaches him, so that everyone may appear what he is in himself, and to what he hath attained.

Thou art beautiful, my Beloved, and exceedingly lovely ; not to the flesh, but to the mind ; not to the eye nor to any of the senses, but to the believing soul, that hath a pure heart, and hath transferred her affections to things invisible and spiritual.

Whosoever would be united to ‘Thee by devout affections then, must of necessity mortify all carnal desires in himself, and above all things strictly preserve purity of conscience. For it is displeasing to Thee, if anyone goes to the creatures in quest of consolation.

On this account Thou callest me to love Thee in the inner man, and directest me that I should wait for Thee ; because then I shall find Thee, as often as I despise myself ; and whatsoever Thou wilt that will I will.

And this will be for my entire good, that I may freely worship Thee, and freely serve Thee ; not fearing to lose anything,

¹ Keble, *Christian Year* : Monday before Easter.

making no terms with love, because Thou delightest in the soul that loves Thee purely.

Oh, that I might be wholly united to Thee in such a union, in life and in death ! But I often go far away from Thee in other ways, in loving perishing things, and not seeking the end which it becomes me to do.

From the consideration that he has been made for the praise and glory of God, Thomas is led to speak of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, His omniscience and providence ; and to pray that all His servants throughout the world, and especially those dedicated to His service, may with the voice of concord publish His name ; and that having their hearts powerfully stirred up to love Him, they may perfect all their works to His glory.

He then continues addressing his God and Saviour in words full of holy beauty :—

Oh, how kind, how sweet Thou art, to them that love Thee ! how pleasant to them that taste Thee ! They who have experienced Thy sweetness know from hence to think and speak better of it ; for Thy sweetness passes all sweetness, and sweetens every bitterness.

O Lord my God ! Holy men have spoken concerning Thee, and the Prophets have not kept silence. All the Saints that have been from the beginning of the world have believed in Thee.

They have served Thee, they have worshipped Thee with sacrifices and gifts, they have praised and blessed Thy holy Name because they have acknowledged Thee as their Creator, and as the Founder of all things, and they have trusted in Thee above all things.

They recognised Thee in their visions ; and, inasmuch as Thou didst reveal Thy Name unto them, they knew none other beside Thee. They kept the law of Thy commandments which Thou gavest them.

They followed not the most foolish fables of the false gods, but they adored Thee, Who livest for ever and ever, and hast created all things.

They lifted up their voices to Thee in the confession of praise, for Thou from on high didst pour into their ears a mighty voice, saying, 'I AM, that I AM.'¹ 'Before Me there was no God found, neither shall there be after Me.'² I have decreed things

¹ Exod. iii. 14.

² Isai. xliii. 10.

which are yet to be, and things that are past are not perished from My memory.

Hearing and understanding these words, they also lifted up the eyes of faith from afar off, believing that the Lord would save us, and that He that was to come, would come, and would not lie.

Knowing these things beforehand, they were not a little comforted, and, admiring exceedingly the Presence of that future Majesty, they fainted for astonishment.

Recovering themselves a little, and beholding with joy the coming power of God, they said, 'It is Himself, it is He, the Lord our God, and none other. He has begun, and He will save us.

'He cannot deny Himself, because He is true. Like as we have heard, so have we seen ; like as we believe, so do we speak and testify to the truth.'

God spake once. He spake, and it was done. He said, 'My counsel shall stand, but yours, O ye sons of men, shall perish.'

Wrapt up in the spirit of devotion, his soul seems kindled with the flame of holy zeal for the glory of God ; but first appealing to the scoffer and to the heedless, he says :—

It is not good that ye should turn away. Stand, and consider your ways. Return and come ; He will receive you freely, for the Lord is merciful and gracious.

He keepeth not His anger as man, but pardoneth all sins, and will moreover restore the former with the latter grace.

Only be converted with your whole heart, and give yourselves up to Him with a faithful mind.

These are the words of the Saints in my ears ; 'As melody at a feast, or as sweet incense from the censer, so is the Word of God in a pure heart.'

Thy Saints also, O Lord, replenished with Thy Spirit, have declared the memory of Thy abundant sweetness, and have left their eulogiums, to be expressed again by us.

Yea, my discourse is often confined within narrow limits, and has no room to ascend. But if fire come down from above, then shall my speech be kindled. If it burn brightly, it will presently consume me. I cannot stand before its presence, for as chaff is driven away by the wind, so will sorrow be carried hence from my heart ; and as rust is consumed by the fire, so shall my sins be.

The Divine fire that burneth up all things, will cleanse the floor of my heart. Descend and kindle a flame in me ; touch me but a little, and I shall mount upwards.

The past shall not be, and the future shall not be reckoned against me ; for all wickedness shall be cast into oblivion.

Old things shall pass away ; the new shall come in abundance, and holy desires shall overflow, and rise up on every side, wherever the cherishing Spirit bloweth.

There shall be no more fear, but love shall fill all ; trembling shall cease ; for this change is from the right hand of God. What I speak, therefore, is not my praise, but His.

Consolation is sent to the mourner, bread is given to the hungry, and the thirsty receive drink. A hand is given to the weak, and a staff is brought to the tottering ; the fainting soul has recovered strength, and the weary found rest.

A new light has arisen to him that is in despair, and an answer is brought to him that cries. A sweet light has streamed in on the darkened soul, a way was shown to the ignorant, and a door opened without delay to him that knocked.

Truth has flashed in upon the doubting, authority has succoured the hesitating ; and mother-charity has met them on the way who were inquiring.

When I desired to speak to my Beloved, He Himself met me most joyfully. 'Behold ! I am here,' He said, 'tell me now what new thing has happened. But let it not slip from thee what thou art both to do and suffer for Me.'

When I wished to go with Him, He forbade me not, and presently I ascended, and forgot whatever troubles I had.

When I longed to dwell with Him, He would not at once make me sad, but with gentle words He taught me that for the present it was not convenient so to be. 'Thy longing' (saith He) 'is good, and the petition which thou hast presented is pleasing to Me, but it must be deferred for awhile.

'Go, and return to thy home, and tell thy friends what great things the Lord hath done for thee. And say unto them, "Prepare everyone your hearts, and lay aside the heavy burden of sin ; and be watchful and strong against the snares of the devil."

'Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The time is near when I shall come ; see that I find you ready. Behold I have told you beforehand.'¹

The very pulse of the soul of à Kempis seems to beat

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xi.

in such a glorious hymn of praise. It forms a magnificent *Te Deum*, which should arouse the most lukewarm heart, and kindle a fresh flame of joyful thankfulness in the believer's soul. The following passages appear in no wise inferior to it; and while Thomas à Kempis proceeds in lofty strains of devout affection to profess his unwavering attachment to God as his only, supreme good in life, he brings us into the innermost chamber of his soul, where he is wont to seek God, and to meditate upon Divine things.

Beginning another chapter with the text, 'Say to my soul, I am thy salvation,'¹ he continues, sometimes speaking to God, and sometimes to his own soul.

Oh, my soul ! how noble thou art, what a wonderful power lies hid in thee, for thou canst not rest until thou attain the highest good, and find out the ultimate end ; which being recognised and found, thy restlessness shall cease.

O Good beyond all good, O End without end, when shall I enjoy Thee without stint, and without end ? Here I find many good things, which do but refresh, not satisfy me. One thing moreover is needful. This one thing I seek for ; this one thing I desire.

On account of One all things are, and from One all things come. And if I have this I shall be content, and unless I obtain it I shall always be restless ; for many things cannot satisfy me.

What is this One ? I know not what to say, yet I feel within me the desire ; and that there is nothing better, nothing greater, and yet it cannot be conceived. For This is not One among all, but One above all.

It is my GOD, to Whom it is good for me to cleave, and cling fast to. To Him I speak, to Him I cry aloud ; 'Say unto my soul, I am thy Salvation.'

What is there beyond this that thou longest for, O my soul, full of desires ? Is it not better to cleave unto One than to many. From One many things come, not One from many.

Cease to seek for many, unite thyself to the One, cling to the One, for in the One all things consist.

Let others seek many and various things without, do thou seek the one inward Good, and it is sufficient.

Lo ! one wants a country seat, another pursues his merchan-

¹ Ps. xxxv. 3.

dise ; one hoards up silver and much gold ; another follows pleasures and honours ; one needs friends and relations, another gladly visits his acquaintance and kindred.

One enters cities and castles, and led by the lust of the eye, traverses various parts of the world ; one covets wisdom, another power, another the magistracy, another royal or chief appointments.

And in this way one follows one thing, and another another, in either the civil or ecclesiastical state. Few singly and simply seek one thing, and for the sake of One ; and therefore they find not lasting peace, nor taste internal grace.

For they who are Christ's seek neither temporal nor earthly things, as if they would then become great and glorious when they had these things in abundance.

Thomas then questions his soul whether his heart is in any wise set upon anything worldly, lest it should hinder him attaining to the full enjoyment of the one only Good. And that if his soul has in any measure found that one only Good, he exhorts and urges himself to guard and treasure it above all things ; since it will not be grievous at any time to be deprived of other things if he truly possesses that one sovereign Good, as it will far outweigh, and abundantly stand in the place of, all other things. He then continues :--

Seek then, now, O my soul, so singular and super-eminent a Good. As long as thou art in the flesh, cease not to seek ; since that can never be sought enough, which can never be grasped to the full.

But there will be an end of seeking when the hour of enjoyment comes. Then He will be all in all, even He the One alone, sufficient for all jointly, and for each severally.

And although He is even there to be sought for, where He is always to be found, it will not be as it is here with much labour, but with the greatest joy and love.

But *what* He is to the godly in this life may be learnt by many names, and it is well known to experienced souls. Attend then a little while—taking experience for my guide—to the names of the Divine Goodness. I will expound a few, but His grace will teach the more, and holier ones.

Behold ! He is a Bridegroom to them that love Him ; and a

Lord to be had in reverence, by those who still serve Him in fear.

He is a Father to His good children ; but a severe Judge to the wicked.

He is a Physician to the sick ; and solid Food to the strong.

He is a Teacher to the ignorant ; and Eternal Salvation to them that obey Him.

He is the Way to beginners, the Truth to the proficient, and Life to the perfect.

He is the Hope of the penitent ; and the best Comforter of the just.

He is the Glory of the humble ; and the Confusion of the proud.

He is a Light in darkness, and a Lamp in the night.

He giveth medicine to sick minds ; and the wine of joyfulness in abundance to the sorrowful.

He stands by them that fight, He walks with them that press onward, He runs with those full of fervour, He flies away with the contemplative.

He is present with them that pray, He speaks with them that read, and rests with them that meditate.

In all these the one and the same God worketh, appearing to everyone as He pleaseth, for there is no censuring His words, nor any searching out of His works.

Be thy meditations rather, and thy affections still more frequently, turned on the humble footsteps of JESUS ; and seek not to climb to high things, lest thou be overpowered with the glory.

Nevertheless because intense love sometimes forgetteth reverence and fear, it may be pardoned, if sometimes the loving soul is mightily inflamed with her Beloved ;

So that she inquires, not only how He cried out as a little child in the stable, or when crucified as He hung upon the cross ; but after what manner He reigns gloriously in Heaven, and governs wonderfully all things under Heaven.

Then addressing the Blessed Saviour in simple yet touching words that well up spontaneously from his heart, as if overflowing with the fervour of the Divine love Thomas cries out :—

Gladly do I follow Thee, O Beloved Jesus, while on earth, but much more gladly would I follow Thee to Heaven : for where my Treasure is, there will my heart be also.

Thou art my Treasure, dearer than every creature, Thou Who art at the right hand of God. For me Thou becamest Incarnate, for me Thou hast been exalted.

Thou hast left me an example on earth ; Thou keepest Thyself as my reward in Heaven. To Thee, then, mine eyes are lifted up, after Thee all my steps shall go.

My heart speaks to Thee, saying, 'My face seeketh Thee. Thy face, O Lord, will I continually seek after. How long, O Lord, shall the vision of Thy glory be deferred? Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and regardest me as Thy enemy?'

Thou knowest indeed how the mind is carried hither and thither, and my affections are drawn and withdrawn diverse ways, until it is united to Thee, as to its lovely One in Heaven.

For the strength of love knows no rest, but unceasingly seeketh for her Beloved, sends out messengers, redoubles prayers, and not even then does she relax, because love would altogether possess that for which it longs.

Draw me then, that I may begin to run fervently after Thee. I need drawing, yea much drawing. For unless Thou drawest, no one comes, no one follows, because everyone turneth to himself.

If Thou drawest, behold I come ; behold I hasten, I run, I am in a fervour. But if not, I neither run, nor do I seek, scarcely do I desire to follow. But if Thou givest me Thy hand, I run the more quickly the more strongly Thou drawest.

It is the voice of my Beloved that draws me, and says, 'And when I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.'¹ O good Jesus, draw me after Thee ; and not I only, but all of us who run after the odour of Thy ointments.

First then draw me after Thee, and then may others follow when they see the example of a good life. But lest we should become proud, it is good for us to feel this at all times, that we begin to run not in our own strength, but after the odour of Thy ointments.

Then comes a short reflection, to the effect that without this Divine drawing none can advance, no, nor even begin, since Christ hath said, 'No man cometh unto me, except the Father draw him.' And speaking of one that was thus drawn he adds that, not all are so affected, nor is it a little soul that can so readily follow Christ in all things ; and

¹ St. John xii. 32.

then in reproachful terms for having any lingering affection for earthly things, and inciting himself to rise to things above, he again addresses his soul in these words, which give us further insight into the state of his heart at this time.

What hinders thee, my soul, that thou dost not forsake all for Jesus? Why so unwilling to separate from vain and perishing things? What do the things seen advantage thee?

Behold as thou passest through things mortal and amidst creatures visible, seeking to be contented in them, thou lovest better things.

Thou separatest thyself from the sovereign Good, when thou doest this, and turnest away thyself from the true and blessed Life which is Eternal. Therefore thou wilt continue miserable and unhappy, full of sorrow and anxiety.

For wheresoever thou art disposed to turn thyself, thou wilt always find pain and much disquietude, unless thou turn again to thy Creator, Who is thy peace and sure rest.

But if thou tarriest not too long in earthly things, and fixest not thy foot in the mire, but shalt rather consider and reverence in the glass of the creatures, not the image that passeth away, but Him Whose image and superscription they bear, thou wilt be blessed and shalt not die.

For when thou seekest not altogether visible things to enjoy them, but beholdest them to bless the name of thy Creator—fashioning to thyself out of the highest and lowest of His works a sort of ladder, on which thou mayst lean to get upwards—thou shalt be delivered from the baneful snares of this world, and shalt be closely united to thy desired End, Which is above all, God, blessed for ever. Amen.¹

I shall give one more soliloquy, evidently uttered during this season of sacred fervour, for with those which precede it it is full of the deepest instruction, and such as may be counted of the highest value in the attaining of the interior life. Renewing his communing with God, in the words of this Scripture ‘My soul hangeth upon Thee;’² he goes on:—

My God, true Comforter, Thou knowest that I am not weary of Thee; but I rejoice daily to speak with Thee in secret.

¹ *Soliloquium Anima*, ch. xii.

² Ps. xlix. 2.

But where shall I seek Thee, if peradventure I lose Thee for an hour? Who will lead me unto Thee? Thou art God, above all things : and I, among these lower things, am a very poor man.

Thou art in heaven, and I on the earth. Thou alone art the Most High, and I am indeed poor and needy.

Who hath measured the distance between heaven and earth? They are far apart, but Thou art further from me. Who will then unite me to Thee? Either Thou must do it, or there is none that can. Nevertheless, if Thou wilt, it can be speedily done.

But Thou knowest that of myself I am prone to fall, but by Thee it is given me to stand, and also to advance. Therefore my soul hangs on the condescension of Thy Spirit and in the infusion of saving grace.

When Thou commandest, she will be lifted up from the earth ; but when Thou turnest away Thy face she will be disquieted within herself.

Yet because of Thy charity and loving-kindness Thou shalt take me up, and Thy right hand shall wonderfully lead me unto Thee.

Children of earth, and sons of men, hear ye, that it is possible, and most easy with God to fulfil that which is written. 'The rich and poor meet together.' I am poor and in need of all things : He is rich, He is my God, wanting nothing.

Although I have not great experience in this matter, yet have I faithful testimony whereby I can prove this, that the soul may, by grace, be united to God. 'My Beloved is mine, and I am His. He feedeth among lilies.'¹ This is the testimony of a friend and his lover, of the Bridegroom and the Bride, a most suitable and valid testimony out of the sacred law.

And the second is like unto this : 'I will, Father, that they all may be one, as We also are One.'² Behold, the plain testimony of the two Books ; by which it is as clear as the day, that the soul may be closely united to God, according to the grace bestowed upon it from heaven.

And though it is a rare case, yet it is very clear, and not unknown to the loving soul. Difficult though it also be, yet it is not altogether impossible. The soul, therefore, that God shall so join to Himself let no man dare to put asunder or disturb.

If thou art astonished at the greatness of this union, be astounded and admire the excellency of His goodness, and not less, at the singular union in His assumption of our humanity.

Let Him, Who alone doeth wonderful things, do unto thee,

¹ Cant. ii. 16.

² St. John xvii. 21.

what He will. If thou seekest the merit of approval, thou wilt find the good pleasure of His will.

Oh ! sweet society with Christ, and under the wings of Christ. Oh ! gracious intimacy, full of love, and of the sweetness of the Holy Ghost, which is better felt than described.

This belongs to the soul, which has weaned itself from all worldly things, which no love of the present life holds captive, but which in the secret of her mind is carried upwards.¹

This season of fervour in which the light of God's countenance seemed to shine upon à Kempis continued for some time ; how long we know not, nor is it needful to determine: but by degrees it is observable that a change came over him, his soul became oppressed, the sky above him seemed to gather darkness, and the light that cheered him to depart. And to this new phase of his spiritual history I must now revert.

In the making of some superior musical instrument, designed to produce sweet melodious sounds, it is not only necessary that the wood or other materials of which it is made be sound and well adapted for the purpose, and the several parts properly adjusted, but it is needful afterwards that it should pass through more practised hands, that its tones may be accurately set, and the various finer touches given to it, till it is rendered as perfect as it is possible to be made. Less skilled workmen may be employed in the initiatory processes of manufacture, but it is reserved to the master-mind to complete the work, and make it what it was designed to be. The same may be said of some beautiful statue carved out of a rude block of marble ; the early stages of chiselling are usually done by ordinary workmen accustomed to the operation, and then it is taken in hand by the true artist himself, who thoroughly understands his profession, and has a peculiar faculty or skill to bring out to view the special contour and varied features of the human face and form, so that the inanimate figure may become life-like and instinct with the particular expressions of the individual it is to represent. And a mar-

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xiii.

vellous beauty is brought to light which becomes a joy to the beholder.

Now all God's rational creatures are as instruments of music to make melody before God and to shew forth His praises ; they are all designed to be moulded according to the likeness of His dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Alas ! that so many never raise their voices in sweet accents of thankfulness, or make glad their souls with the melody of His name. Alas ! that such numbers become deformed and get their souls disfigured by the wounds and stains of sin, and by their forgetfulness of God. Yet with those souls who are drawn nigh unto Him, and seek to do His will, it is otherwise. God dealeth with them as master-artists do with their several works ; He Himself takes them in hand to perfect and beautify them, and to make them meet for doing Him service here on earth, and fitting them for the inheritance of the saints in light hereafter. Usually, at the first, God makes use of others who are His servants, and of the many varying events of life, to mould the soul into some conformity to His purpose : the parent, the friend, the master—the love or the loss of some dear one, a happy pious home, or tender affectionate sympathy, some earthly trial, perplexity, or calamity, or some special blessing—one and all are employed to lead the souls of His children nearer to Himself. But there is ever a perfecting process which He Himself undertakes, and through His Blessed Spirit carries on in the hearts of those who come to Him. For are we not told that ' He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap ? ' Nay more, ' He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.' In addition then to the means used through human instrumentality and the various circumstances of life, God Himself takes the soul in hand in some higher and mysterious way to complete its character, to make it more Christ-like, more serviceable to His will, more precious in His sight, more fitted for His glory. The Father of spirits having enfolded

the soul in the arms of His love, now appears to leave it to itself for awhile, as a mother leaves the child of her love which she has nursed so tenderly in her bosom ; not that she has less affection for it than before, for her heart yearns after it, but that it may be weaned and made stronger thereby. And as with the child, so with the soul ; when it becomes sad and disconsolate, perplexed and cast down, the season for learning higher lessons in the spiritual life begins : learning not to depend upon pious emotions or fervent feelings, but to walk more by faith with God, to cling to Him when all is dark and adverse, to exercise patience and submission, to learn how to wait upon God, and where to look for strength and guidance, and no longer to trust in herself.

Thus it was with Thomas à Kempis. We have seen how through God's providence he was blessed with pious parents, how he was early associated with earnest-minded souls, godly companions, learned and devout teachers, a much loved and revered spiritual master, and had the affectionate sympathy and encouragement of a brother devoted to God, what a holy fellowship of good men encircled him, and how his soul was enkindled by this communion of saints to aim after the pattern of Christ according to the lives of the primitive Christians. And then how he was suffused in an atmosphere of Divine love. And now we have arrived at that further critical period in his spiritual history, when à Kempis is to be tried and put to the proof—whether he will still hold fast by God even amid the desolation and deadness that come over him, and when the joy that he had in religion ceases—whether he will endure to the end of this season of probation, or turn to the world for comfort and happiness, and seek satisfaction in the desires of the flesh. Many fall away at such times.

It is easy and pleasant to serve God and engage in religious exercises when it goes well with the soul, and it experiences a sweet fervour and delight ; but it is a sore trial when it is otherwise ; and yet our trust in God, our still serving Him, our waiting upon Him, and submitting

ourselves to His afflictive dispensation, all this is the more pleasing to Him and more acceptable than at other times, and manifests more clearly the nobleness and steadfastness of our faith, because of the struggle and endurance. Never did the excellency of Job's religion shine more brightly, never did he glorify God more than when in the depth of his woe, he could exclaim, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' Never was the faith of Abraham more manifest and more acceptable to God than when against hope he believed in hope, and when called upon to offer up his son Isaac was ready to obey, accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead: and well was he called the Father of the Faithful. And so with à Kempis in this saddest and most grievous season of his spiritual experience; never did he more clearly manifest his trust in God and glorify Him than at this time. This darkest passage of his life proved to be the most salutary and most glorious, and wrought in him, through Divine grace, much good, making him more dear to God. In the best known of his works there are some traces and allusions to his having passed through this period of sore trial; but from what he says in another treatise we shall learn more fully how deeply he felt it, and how piously he bore himself under it. Yet as in the days when he enjoyed the bright sunshine of God's presence some clouds would flit across his soul, so here, amidst the darkness that hovered over him, gleams of hope would occasionally break in.

An anecdote is related in the '*De Imitatione Christi*' which is supposed by Valart to have reference to an occurrence which happened to Thomas à Kempis during this time when he was visited with severe depression of soul. It is as follows:—

When a certain person, who was in anxiety of mind, often wavering between hope and fear, did one day, on his being oppressed with grief, prostrate himself in prayer before an altar in the church, and said within himself, 'O if I could but know that I should still persevere!' all at once he heard a voice within him from

God which said, 'If thou didst know this, what wouldst thou do? Do now what thou wouldst then resolve to do, and thou shalt be secure enough.'

And immediately being comforted and strengthened, he committed himself to the Divine Will, and his anxious disquietude ceased.

Neither had he the mind to search curiously any farther to know what would befall him in the future, but studied rather to ascertain what was the acceptable and perfect will of God, for the beginning and accomplishing of every good work.¹

There are other passages in this work, which sufficiently shew that he had passed through some great spiritual conflict. Thus, in a chapter 'On the Secret Judgment of God,' he says:—

Thou, O Lord, thunderest Thy judgments over me, and shakest all my bones with fear and trembling, and my soul is exceedingly terrified.

I stand astonished and consider that 'the heavens are not pure in Thy sight.'

If in the angels Thou hast found folly, and didst not spare even them, what shall become of me?

Stars have fallen from heaven, and do I, who am but dust, dare to presume? They whose works seemed commendable have fallen to the lowest depths, and those who did eat the bread of Angels I have seen delighting themselves with the husks of swine.²

And then exclaiming that there is no holiness, no wisdom, no courage, no chastity, no vigilance without the help of God, that we should sink and perish, become inconstant and lukewarm if the Almighty did not uphold us, he continues:—

O how humbly and meanly ought I to think of myself! how ought I to esteem as nothing whatsoever good I seem to have!

O how profoundly ought I to submit myself to Thine unfathomable judgments, O Lord, when I find myself to be only nothing—altogether less than nothing!³

So also further on, when he instructs us to the glorifying God even when in tribulation, he thus speaks of his own conduct under such afflictive dispensations, saying:—

¹ Lib. i. ch. xxv. sec. 2.

² *Ibid.* ch. xiv. sec. 7.

³ *Ibid.* sec. 3.

Blessed be Thy name, O Lord, for ever, Who hast been pleased to visit me with this trial and tribulation.

I cannot escape it, but must of necessity fly to Thee, that Thou mayest help me and turn it to my good.

O Lord, I am now in trouble, and my heart is ill at ease, for I am sorely disquieted by my present suffering.¹

And now, O beloved Father, what shall I say? I am taken in the straits; save me from this hour.

But on this account I came to this hour, that Thou mightest be glorified when I shall have been greatly humbled, and by Thee delivered.

May it please Thee, O Lord, to deliver me; for I am wretched, and what can I do for myself, and whither shall I go without Thee?

Give me patience, O Lord, on this occasion. Help me, O my God, and then I will not fear however much I may be oppressed.²

It may be well to mention here that there is an entire book written by à Kempis containing the sighs of a penitent soul, in a treatise *On True Compunction of the Heart*, which is evidently the fruit and outcome of his own experience at those times when his heart was overwhelmed within him. I shall not stay, however, to give any extracts from it, as I purpose to give the account of this crisis in his soul's history, as it would appear to have been given by him with its various phases and struggles in his '*Soliloquy of the Soul*.'

He had been speaking of the days when it was well with him, and God had made him glad with the light of His countenance, when suddenly a wave of thought brought to his remembrance the days of anguish and darkness of soul that once came over him, when he could find little or no pleasure and comfort in religious services. It is worth while to notice the transition as it is recorded in his own words.

Joyfully would I be present when it is well with the devout soul; and that is when it is with Jesus at noon-day.

It fares ill and is sickly when Jesus is absent, and the odours of His grace cease to flow; when Holy Scripture delights not; when it is wearisome to be instant in prayer and meditation:

¹ 'Sed multum vexor a presenti passione.'

² Lib. iii. ch. xxix. secs. 1, 2.

When the clouds of the heart thicken, and evil thoughts so prevail that they can scarce be checked, and strive to overthrow almost all former good.¹

And then he begins the story as to how his soul was troubled, how he mourned in his prayers, and sought for deliverance. It reminds us to some extent of a similar crisis through which the Psalmist passed, when he tells us how his heart was disquieted within him—how fearfulness and trembling had come upon him, and an horrible dread had overwhelmed him.² Thomas à Kempis, pleading with God, cries out on this wise :—

O Lord God, why doest Thou thus? What strange sport is this? Oh ! Good Jesus, what meanest Thou by this? Were it not displeasing to Thee, I would hear further intercourse between Thee and Thy beloved.

Since in all her wishes she seeks Thy gracious presence with which to be caressed with pure delights, I wonder why Thou allowest her sometimes to remain desolate. Thou passest by, and withdrawest, as if she had not sought Thee.

But she moaneth and is solitary ; for that is her voice which seems to say, ‘ My soul hath longed for Thee in the night season.’ It is night to her when Thou, the true Light, art not present.

Therefore she prays for Thy presence, lest the darkness of sin seize hold upon her. Many are the troubles that she feels, when the grace of Thy visitation is withdrawn from her.

For unless she were under some suffering, she would not so longingly have cried after Thee. She hath cried out, and another hath also, in words which have been before spoken, ‘ My soul hangeth upon Thee.’

But I think no trouble can be so grievous, or seem so grievous, as this, that Thy presence should be wanting.

And it is not to be wondered at, if out of this want the loving soul should faint, in a certain languishment of heart.

For Thou art sometimes with difficulty found, and when at length Thou hast been found, she rejoices at Thy return ; hoping to pass a delightful day with Thee, and not fearing Thy withdrawal, she apprehends no sorrow.

But Thou, silently purposing otherwise, dost often take Thy

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, chap. xiii. sec. 3.

² Ps. lv. 1-6 ; see also Psalms xlii. and xliii.

flight. For Thou suddenly withdrawest Thyself from her hands, when she has not the least surmise of it.

I praise Thee ; yet how shall I praise Thee in this matter ? If Thou hast any praise or sweetness, why dost Thou seem to lose it ?

If it had not been Thou, Thou mightest perchance have become a stumbling-block to her. But she cannot become offended in Thee, in that she knows herself to be so powerfully loved.

If, therefore, Thou dost figure out something by such teaching which is just and reasonable, point it out to me, I beseech Thee, O God. For I would very gladly comprehend it, since I deem it not useless, even to know a little concerning it.

For no one of himself can gain an insight into Thy hidden judgments : but Thy light illumines whatsoever is obscure, and dispels that which is noxious.

Wherefore, then, dost Thou sometimes so secretly withdraw Thyself from the soul when she is not aware of it ? Dost Thou love her or not ? If Thou lovest her, why, my Beloved, dost Thou fly away ?

If Thou lovest her not, why didst Thou visit her aforetime ? And if now Thou lovest her not, why dost Thou return again, and knock at the door and enter in ?

Surely Thou art not using any fickleness in thus entering in and going away ? Far be it from Thee ! But such constant changes are no light matter to her : yea, no small disquietude springs therefrom.

And, perchance, her complaint would have been less, if Thou wert openly to say to her, ' I go away, and come again, and thy heart shall rejoice, and thy joy no man shall take from thee.' ¹

But now Thou speakest no precious word to her, and she only remembers that passage of which she experiences the truth, that ' Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the Temple.' ²

I have therefore a few things against Thee ; but my complaining hath sprung from a good root. I humbly desire to be instructed, not impatiently to contend. Do, therefore, give an answer to him that asketh Thee, when it shall be convenient.

Was it that Thomas à Kempis had after this gone to ask counsel of his brother John or some devout Father, or does he now break off as it were, to give some seasonable instruction to some soul that is seeking how to act in such

¹ St. John xvi. 22.

² St. John viii. 59.

a season of darkness and desolation? For the following words seem either to have been addressed to him, or by him to another. It may have been that the matter was referred to in one of those conferences, where two or three devout souls spake together on holy subjects; for there are indications that more than one other person was present. Or it may be an intimation that others piously disposed—and only they—are permitted to share in what is said. Be this as it may, I give the words of Thomas as they arise:—

For the better understanding of this matter, let the devout soul speak somewhat for herself. And do thou on thy part freely answer. For the Beloved will hear thee patiently, and will meet thee with peaceful words, that thou mayest suffer no detriment from Him.

For who will console thee, if He should not be thy Comforter? And who will more graciously bear thy infirmity, than He Who carries all things without weariness?

If thou hast any sorrow, to whom also canst thou more safely reveal it, than to Him Who fully knoweth all things? Or in whom wilt thou put more trust than in Him Who is Infallible Truth?

Now if any of those without, who are not among the friends of the Bridegroom, should hear these things, let him be put out of doors. But if anyone truly delights in the Bridegroom, if he will be faithful, if devout and internal, let free entrance be conceded to him.

If anyone guards his conscience, if he is a lover of virtue and discipline, if pure in affection, and clear in understanding; if he is humble in himself and kind to others:

If he knows how to take the good he hears, without putting an evil construction upon it; if he does not carry himself vainly, nor argue rashly, nor defend angrily, nor speak proudly;

But, on the contrary, if he has learnt to reverence what he cannot understand, and soundly to interpret what is obscure and mystical, let such an one be introduced, and be freely present at this colloquy.

For the affections of the heart in the sound of the words ought rather to be weighed, than the quality of the voice. Tell me, then, O soul, how thou bearest up when the grace of thy Beloved is absent?

I feel that it would be no light thing for me to endure, if He were long absent, and I think something like this *has* happened to thee. If it please thee, let us sit down here together and confer upon this matter, for our mutual comfort.

Whether the interrogatory sentences in what follows were addressed by Thomas to his own soul, as the title of this little work would lead us in some degree to imagine, or to some distressed soul who sought his counsel, or they were addressed to him by one or two devout friends whom he had taken into his confidence, as we have just intimated and as it has been conjectured by another writer, I must leave the reader to decide. I shall give the words of Thomas as written down; and would notice that the quaint method, and the soul-stirring words which he adopts, in relating the story of his sorrow when he missed the consoling presence of Jesus his Beloved, has a singularly touching and sustaining interest. Taking up the words of Scripture, 'My soul slumbereth for very heaviness,'¹ as if they suited his own case, he begins:—

What manner of speech is this that thou utterest? Wherefore sayest thou, O Sion, the Lord hath forsaken me? Fear not, daughter of Sion, loving and watchful soul.

Behold thy King, the most Beloved, will come unto thee. Arise, stand up on high, and see the joy that will come unto thee from thy God.

I have sought Him, saith the soul, but I cannot find Him; I have called unto Him, but He gave me no answer. Therefore my soul slept for heaviness.

And I said, This is the voice of the turtle when she hath lost her mate. It is not to-day as it was yesterday and in days gone by, when thou sangest songs of joy.

The morning passed away, and the evening came; but the Bridegroom lieth down at noon-day, and it is not allowed me to approach Him.

Thy words express sadness, and thine eyes are wet with tears. Thou art in grief, O soul, and hast need of consolation. But tell me how it arises?

It is not gold or silver that I seek for myself, or anything in the world; it is not loss or gain, nor is it injury or penury that

¹ Ps. cxix. 28.

affect me, for as regards these things, I am dead to the world and crucified.

If I know thee well, thou hast long ago renounced all that is in the world ; but I ask, hast thou also perfectly learnt self-abnegation in all things, and hast thou attained to the contempt of thyself?

This is the goal of very few, but it is especially required of thee. Whence then arises thy grief? What hast thou lost?

If it is touching thy Beloved, I know that not without a cause sorrow hath filled thy heart, and nothing can be joyous unto thee till He return, and restore to thee the light of His countenance.

But how in the mean time dost thou keep up, O delicate soul, that leanest upon the Beloved? For it is evident to me, that He is not always present when He is wished for.

When therefore He is absent, wherein dost thou quiet thyself? Tell thy secrets to me, although they be full of grief. None, but he who loves not, will doubt that thou grieveest for Christ's absence.

At present thou art very sad, but it is for Christ, the Bridegroom, it is not for this world ; and I know that when He shall return thou shalt again be comforted, since He will not be forgetful of thee for ever. For He has said, 'I will not leave you comfortless. I go away and will come again to you.'¹

Thy words, therefore, are not unprofitable, though uttered with so much grief, but they manifest the affection of the lover, and strike the cold heart, which is not set on fire with the love of Christ.

For thy voice is sweet; it is the voice of the turtle, not the clamour of discontent ; therefore I trust thou wilt find Him Whom thou mournest after as lost.

Yet I ask thee again, what sayest thou concerning Him Whose absence thou so bitterly bewailest? Is He good, or thinkest thou otherwise?²

Good indeed He is, and most exceeding good ; righteous and faithful, in Whom there is no iniquity, nor indeed can be.

Why then grieveest thou for one that is good, in Whom is no guile?

I grieve not concerning Him that is good, because He is good ; but I bewail my own misery, because I have lost a good and faithful friend.

¹ St. John xiv. 18.

² Let the reader observe that here and in other parts, questions are asked as from another, and answers are given in return, which betokens the presence of some one besides the author.

It is I, even I who have deserved this, but woe, woe is me that I have not solicitously guarded His grace. In what I have lost I have learnt the value of what I once possessed.

The absence of the Beloved shows me what His presence conferred. I was glad and rejoiced in Him, and was little apprehensive of his speedy departure.

He came skipping on the mountains; joyous and pleasant appeared He at the gates of my house: and immediately the doors of the flesh were closed, and I brought in the Beloved to me, and I sat with Him, and rested under His shadow, safe from the storm and tempest.

Then was I glad, when I beheld my Beloved. Why should I not rejoice? He is the joy, the exultation of my heart. Ah! what I had then, what did I possess in that hour.

It is not possible for me to tell thee, how well it was with me; nor is it expedient indeed that I should now tell thee. When He Whom alone I loved was present, nothing more could I desire.¹

This has indeed been the experience of many of God's saints in later times also, who could look back to the happy days they passed in yielding their hearts to Jesus in the freshness of their first love: how much do the words of Thomas à Kempis remind us of the words of one who in later days sang:—

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.—*Cowper*.

Though there are a thousand ways through which the soul is made sad and solitary, and the circumstances of all may vary much, yet the same one feeling, a sense of wanting God's blessed presence, has been more or less felt by His people. But to keep to the sorrowful complaints of à Kempis during this season of trial; as he thought of the holy and pious moments gone by, he thus breaks forth:—

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xiv.

Oh ! how much I loved Him, when I neglected myself, and all things else. I cared little or nothing for all that could charm me, because His love ravished me altogether, and whatsoever concerned Him not, seemed incongruous and insipid.

When He was taken away, my heart was almost clean gone from me. For my soul hung upon His grace, because I had no other comfort besides Him, Whose absence I lamented.

He was sufficient for me, and was enough for every kind of gladness. What I desired, such He was. And whatever He enjoined me to do, I gladly accepted, and gave myself wholly and promptly to Him.

And there was a concord of mind and great tranquillity between us. Neither durst anyone break in upon our silence, when He had commanded through His mouth on this wise :

‘I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my Beloved, till she desire it.’¹

Weigh well now my words, if thou canst understand them, how much I must needs mourn the absence of my Beloved, through Whose presence I began to be enriched with all good things.

And to these words I answered : I know of what thou speakest : I have often proved by experience what thou sayest. But in this let us console ourselves, that the dispensations of His will are for the advancement of our devotion.

And now, thankfully do I receive what thou hast said ; but I still wish to hear more perfectly concerning these things. For to those who are slow of understanding a more particular declaration is needed.²

This sacred colloquy had been interrupted, or broken off for a time. If Thomas à Kempis had been relating to a few of his devout Brethren how it fared with him, when so much cast down in soul, or had been speaking of it to some disconsolate one seeking godly counsel, it is evident they parted for awhile with the desire that he should give them a circumstantial account of this spiritual distress, and how he again sought after Christ and the riches of His grace. With these words of Scripture : ‘Blessed be God, who hath not turned His mercy from me,’³ the confe-

¹ *Songs of Solomon*, ch. ii. 7. ² *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xiv. sec. 3.

³ Ps. lxvi. 20.

rence is thus renewed. The words are given as they arise :—

Here I am again then, seeking to inquire of thee, what thou in the mean time doest when thy Beloved at any time leaveth thee without internal consolation? What dost thou advise also on such an occasion? And by what means can He be reconciled or called back?

I entreat thee, O dearest and devout spouse of Christ, keep none of these things secret from me, which I have come to question thee about. Thou canst by this means do me a service, by imparting to me what thou piously thinkest.

From thy words, I can measure the weight of my own grief, and whether I sorrow justly or unjustly. For I have seen thee at times cheerful, and at other times very sorrowful, and then again I have beheld thee rejoicing, and from thee I have in some measure considered my own case.

But I reckon that the cause of this change most chiefly arises from the withdrawal and the return of thy only Beloved ; in which case, knowing that thou hast suffered many things, I have come to be instructed.

And she (that soul) said, In yielding to thy wishes, I will endeavour to state openly what things were transacted within me ; whether it be when I am with the Beloved, or when I remain alone, as one that is weaned, expecting Him Whom my soul loveth.

Truly this thou shouldst know first, that in proportion to the joy and sweetness which His grace confers upon me, even so great is the grief and bitterness which His absence causes. But why He thus changes His manner, it were more fitting for Him to say, than for me.

But thou shalt hear Him, when I have completed the words of my discourse ; because at the close we will introduce Him to us ; and sitting in our midst He shall teach us His purpose which He is wont to exhibit towards those that love Him.

But now listen patiently, and let not my imperfect speech be grievous unto thee ; for we are come together mutually to incite our hearts, that we may either grieve together, or rejoice together from love.

For woe to him that is alone ; for when he falleth into depression or temptation, he hath none to raise him up. But if there be two together they will be mutually comforted.

For when one is distressed, the other will bring in consolation,

or if consolation be refused he presently exerciseth compassion, and he begins vehemently to grieve over his friend. And thus it happens that they either rejoyce together, or if joy be taken away they will console each other with tears.

And although grief, from some adverse cause or mournful matter, may still press upon them, yet will they bear it with equanimity, because they find they are much of one heart ; and when circumstances change, their hearts can never be one whit changed or corrupted.

Who would not exclaim when he beholds so faithful a concord of soul, ‘ Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity ’ ? ¹

Though Thomas à Kempis lived in a monastery and loved retirement, yet here is an instance wherein we see that he was not, as some have thought, a morose recluse, self-sufficient, and self-righteous, standing aloof from others in his own conscious superiority or strength. No, for he was conscious of the weakness and frailty of human nature, and gladly availed himself of those natural supports for sustaining his soul in hours of trial which good men need as well as others. He delighted in godly companionship, as we have before shewn, and it still continued with him, for a social vein appears to manifest itself all through his life. And in what has just been said we see how much he values the presence of a pious friend, and the great benefit which is to be found in having such an one in all the changes and chances of this mortal life.

In what follows Thomas tells us in what various ways the best of all friends, the Lord Jesus, had been gracious to him. It forms as it were a *confession of grace*, and is an interesting disclosure of his inner life : and herein it may be observed how he places his having been baptized as one of the first of his blessings ; and how he alludes to his having obtained a peaceful abode among the Brethren, and the manner in which he also regards it. But we must let Thomas speak of what happened in his own words, and how he clung to Christ through all changes. He says, as if to one listening to him :—

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xv. secs. 1, 2.

I am able to declare unto thee more freely what I feel, because I fear no craft or guile in thee. Behold, that most sweet Bridegroom and my most beloved Friend, my Lord Jesus Christ !

He, the Lover of holy souls, being unable to cease from love, hath drawn me, a miserable wretch, to Himself ; and when I was not, He gave me being, life, understanding, and the enjoyment of this common light.

He conferred upon me the blessing also, through the grace of Baptism, to be born again, and clothed me with the glory of His highest merits.

After this, when I had deformed myself with many sins, and was unfit to return His love again, He looked not on my foulness, but upon the bosom of His mercies.

For although I still wandered further away, He called me by His grace, and would not suffer me to perish in this world.

Then He provided me a moderate place for resting in, so long as I existed in this frail body. And yet this is not the true rest, neither is it that eternal habitation, whatever that may be, under the shadow of the Beloved.

That is the true rest which, after the labours of this present life are over, is enjoyed in the country of the Beloved.

Yet, in its measure, it is a certain sweet discovery to the soul sighing after God, to see herself freed from the heavy chain of this world ; and to be in such a place where she can more fully serve the Beloved, and to be at leisure in secret to attend upon herself and Him.

Moreover, He was not wanting to my divers necessities, assisting me in the onsets of temptation. Frequently also he hath instructed me in useful discourses, confirming me in His Word.

And as new plants are wont to be watered with showers, so He watered me with internal consolations, lest that virtue which was begun in me should be dried up as a potsherd.

And He said to me, ' If thou shalt be willing, and wilt listen to Me, thou shalt see every good thing. If thou doest what I tell thee, thou shalt be My friend.

' If thou wilt choose Me, and wilt love Me above all, whatsoever thou shalt ask of My Father it shall be done unto thee. But if thou forsakest Me, this shall be a stumbling-block to thee, and I will set My zeal against thee.

' And when thou seekest another, he shall not long please thee, but shall be turned into weariness and bitterness, because I am the Salvation and the Life of thy soul.'

And I turned me to Him, Who had been so good to me ; and

rousing myself from the dust of earthly affections, I resolved in my heart to live the remainder of my days to Him alone, since nothing is better than He, no other agreement more salutary than this.

Let whosoever will, go and seek whom they can love, and whom they can serve ; I myself have found this One to be the true Husband of the soul, for Whom it would not be difficult to die, so that I might always possess His love.

I clung to Him, for He was pleasing to me ; neither could I have been able to find a better. For such a One my soul longed most vehemently ; than Whom none could be greater, nor better, nor more worthy, and Who would abound in all good things.

And because He was exceedingly kind, He further gave me comforting words ; and carefully provided that none should affright or oppress me, by too great harshness and severity.

But that they should enjoin upon me and teach me what was light and pleasant to bear ; that hereby the affections, being kindled, might be the better drawn, and more strongly fixed on the Beloved, and not be again withdrawn.

‘She will be better taught and make greater proficiency,’ He said, ‘if she be incited not by compulsion, but of her own accord. More easily will she take My yoke upon her, if love rather invites her by reward, than fear affrighten her by punishment.

‘And if she needs urging on, let this be done by skilful management, that she succumb not through violence.’

For He Himself knew what was expedient for a young plant, and what advantage this very kindness would afterwards confer upon me ; especially in the time of probation which was at hand, when I could easily recall what great things He had done for my soul at the beginning, so that I should not fail in any contest.

Nor did He all at once discover to me, what, and how great trials, I should suffer in His service, but sometimes He intermingled sorrowful things with the joyful, considering the feebleness and incapacity of the just rising shrub, until I was strong enough to bear harder things.¹

All this is strikingly corroborative of what has been hitherto gathered from other sources concerning the earlier part of the religious life of Thomas à Kempis : only here we have the benefit of a more particular account from himself, with many delicate, rare, and sublime touches of the Interior life.

As he proceeds in this beautiful tribute of praise, he tells us how he was led to take a deep interest in the lives of the saints and hermits of the desert ; to peruse with keen delight the various portions of Holy Scripture ; how he was stirred up to gain an insight into its meaning, and to search out its mystical significance. Then he goes on to speak of Christ's tender forbearance and redeeming love towards himself, his frailties, follies and sins ; how Christ received him with gracious tenderness and condescension, and how highly à Kempis esteemed the dignity of his adoption into God's family, and the blessing of being closely and lovingly united to Him. Thus he says :—

After these things He led me about and taught me, and carried me on His shoulders. He led me about through the sacred pages, and armed me with a holy fervour against the wickedness of the devil.

He placed before me, as in a mirror, examples of all virtues, viz. the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, and the glorious luminaries of the New Testament.

He led me also through the places of the desert, and the tabernacles of Egypt, where the great names of monks and cœnobites had flourished and increased, who by their examples showed and made it credible that the yoke of Christ was sweet, and the broad way of the world was bitter and deceitful.¹

He taught me, as a mother her little one, breaking spiritual nuts for me, and putting the kernels into my mouth, because they were sweet to feed on.

Investigate, if thou canst, what they mean, and where such may be found. Open the book of the Apostles, and casting thine eyes thereon read, if thou canst grasp such great mysteries.

Meditate on Isaiah, look well into the Gospels, the Light of all lights, and see if they do not produce most delicious kernels. Whatsoever in these thou findest obscure and hard to be understood is the kernel in the shell.

And if thou hearest it explained, and understandest what before thou couldst not, the shell is broken, and the sweetness of the kernel will be relished in the heart.

And thus in other more intricate sentences must it be under-

¹ See how à Kempis alludes to them in the *Imitatio*, where he says, 'O how strict and self-renouncing a life led those holy Fathers in the wilderness ;' and the several following verses. Lib. i. cap. xviii. 2, 3.

stood. And hence thou canst find as many nuts as there are hidden meanings.

And how, thinkest thou, did He carry me on His shoulders? This He did as often as He beheld my weakness, and yet did not cast me away nor despise me, but sustained me with patience and longsuffering.

He carried me on His shoulders also, when He inspired others, and gave them the virtue of bearing patiently with my infirmities and whatever was reprehensible in me.

He carried me still more lovingly on His shoulders, when bearing the cross upon Himself, He went forth into a place called Calvary, where He was crucified.

For I was there carried by Him, rather than that cross; and my sins were a heavier burden upon His shoulders than this wood of the cross.

And that cross was carried for me, and not for Himself. Yet it deserves to be held sacred and to be honoured, because of Him Who carried it and died upon it.

Oh! how much above all should He be loved and revered, by Whose merits and grace I have been thus sought and re-deemed.

Therefore this Beloved shall be to me, as an only child to his mother; though I truly know that I am by no means suited for His love. But still whereinsoever I have presumed it has proceeded from His condescension.

And did it not follow, that when He had borne Himself so kindly towards me, I could not run to other embraces? I remember what David said, 'Who am I to become the son-in-law of a king?'¹

But far greater is the former than the latter affinity, because this is a pure and sincere relationship, where flesh and blood have no part, but an inviolate fidelity and the answer of a good conscience towards God.

Concerning which, that disciple whom Jesus most loved said, 'Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world.'² For God is love, and this love begetteth this alliance.

When David then so humbled himself when he became the son-in-law of an earthly king, how humbly ought I to think of myself when the Lord, the King of kings, deigns to notice me, a very poor creature, and to draw me to His love.

He hath therefore dealt with me, not as I deserved, but

¹ 1 Sam. xviii. 23.

² 1 John iv. 4.

according as His most supreme kindness thought worthy, and as in all things it seemed meet to His love and infinite goodness.

Happy and blessed is that soul, which is enfolded in the bonds of Divine love! How noble and honourable is she who does not ignore the vows of so holy a union! ¹

And here it would appear that an adjournment of this sacred colloquy took place; for the chapter concludes with these words: 'And now since the discourse concerning the Beloved hath already proceeded very far, and I have not yet narrated what thou inquirest after, let another discourse follow, which may He deign to make pleasant and fruitful to us.' And from what is written it may be observed that à Kempis has here gradually brought to a close his account of that second phase of his spiritual history of which mention has been made; for on resuming his discourse he enters upon the third or final stage of the soul's progress, in which he shews how God led him out of his sad depression, set his feet as it were upon a rock, and ordered his goings, till he attained to a settled peace with God. Before proceeding, however, with the recital of this later change in his inner life, I shall take occasion to allude to some other matters which were transpiring in the little devout circle of the pious fraternity, of which he was so bright and devout a member.

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xv. secs. 6, 7, 8, 9.

CHAPTER XIX.

Events, 1406-1414—John à Kempis sent to found a New House—The election of a successor—The account of several Brothers who died—The consecration of the Church and Cemetery—The advancement of Thomas à Kempis in the Religious Life—The way of patiently abiding on God His Saviour—The reason wherefore the Christian is tried—The blessedness of enduring.

THOMAS À KEMPIS was in his twenty-sixth year when he made his profession and was fully admitted into the Order of Canons Regular ; and if we take the events of the next eight years it will bring us to the time when he was ordained priest, and had begun to compose the first books of his most celebrated work, the '*De Imitatione Christi*.'

The chief matters of importance which had transpired in the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes after Thomas à Kempis had been made a Canon Regular, were the resignation of the first Prior, his brother John, and the election of his successor. I have already noticed what was recorded concerning John à Kempis ; and now, after giving a reason wherefore he was called away from Mount St. Agnes, the Chronicler proceeds to tell us something concerning the person selected to fill his place, together with some account of what the second Prior did whilst he continued with them.

John à Kempis had been early recognised in the Brotherhood as having a special faculty for organization, and for infusing an earnest spirit of hearty obedience, order, affection, and self-denial among those with whom he was associated. He had been a favourite disciple of their founder, and had become thoroughly imbued with his design in projecting the establishment of those institutions for the furtherance of a higher Christian life ; so that they might

not only be exemplary models for existing monasteries, but also be the means of drawing up to a higher level of godly living, numbers of people in the world around them. In the year 1408 he was therefore invited, and sent by the Chapter of Windesheim—from whence the chief direction of the whole community issued—to begin a new monastery, with a few persons willing to join him, at a place near Bommel, a city on the Rhine in North Brabant, but so close to the border that it looks over into Gelderland.

After he had departed, the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes looked about them for another fitting person to take his place. Thomas was much interested in the matter; and it was one well considered by the Brethren dwelling there. Whether at the suggestion of those who had promoted Prior John to another post, or on the application of the Brethren of the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes to the Chapter at Windesheim, a Brother from the latter House was chosen to be the second Prior. He was called Brother William Vorniken, and was elected on the Sunday previous to the day for commemorating the Ascension of our Blessed Lord. For seventeen years he presided over their monastery, and Thomas à Kempis speaks of him as ‘a lover of poverty and discipline.’ ‘Afterwards,’ says à Kempis, ‘he was taken from our House and made Prelate of the superior House of Windesheim, and became the Father General of our whole Order.’

Thomas, who was well aware of what this Prior did, and how he lived and was serviceable to the monastery at Mount St. Agnes, tells us that he caused the pulpit in the church to be erected, and had new and fitting seats made for the choir. He also procured beautifully ornamented vestments for the priests and other ministers, to be worn on the Sundays and Festivals of the Church. He enlarged the boundaries of the monastery; he built a new house for the husbandmen, and folds near at hand for the flocks; he planted divers sorts of trees, and among them those bearing fruit, in many places in the grounds belonging to the community; the rougher portions moreover of the mountain,

which for the most part had been as yet untouched, he planted, and reduced the sandy tracts to service. He decorated the sacrarium with pictures, wrote books for the choir and good copies for practising; he also illuminated many books. Yet in all these things poverty and simplicity were as a friend to him. Out of love he received many laymen, that they might live, or sojourn for a time, in the monastery, so that, as Thomas has it, they might, by persevering faithfully in holy living, and by bringing themselves under subjection in the community, become worthy to receive the reward of eternal life. From several of these he received gifts for the monastery; and to certain of them he gave the habit of the lay brethren.¹ During the period that he continued Prior at Mount St. Agnes he invested fourteen clerical Brethren. The names of them are given, with the dates of their investiture and certain particulars respecting each. I need not, however, give them here, lest the recital become tedious, for there is to some extent a similarity in them to those I have already mentioned; let it suffice that most of these Brethren came from the neighbourhood of Zwolle and Campen.

There is, however, a great charm in these simple annals of the religious Fraternity to which Thomas à Kempis belonged; and, as we proceed, I shall continue to select such matters as appear to have any special interest. Besides keeping a chronicle of what immediately concerned the Monastery at Mount St. Agnes, he had, as I have intimated, another book in which he recorded other events of interest respecting 'the Brothers of Common Life' in general. Therein we observe how he notes, that after the death of Amilius, the successor of Florentius at Deventer, John Haerlem succeeded in the government of the House, where he had formerly lived. And the recording of this shews that he still felt a deep interest in what happened to the Brethren there, though he was now separated from them.

In the year 1408, some little time after Thomas had

¹ *Conversi*.

been made a Canon Regular, the first House or Convent for the Sisters (*sanctimonialium*) of their Order was established and opened at Dieppenheim, a little to the south-east of Deventer. The investiture of the Sisters, when they were received into the Order of Canons Regular, was on the Feast of St. Agnes, 'our own patron saint,' as Thomas has it. And from the minute particulars which he gives us we may almost imagine that he was present on the occasion : for he tells us that the investiture was performed by John Huesden, the venerable Prior of Windesheim ; the Prior of the Blessed Mary, near Arnheim, and brother John Kempen, Prior of Mount St. Agnes, being present. A large number of devout persons of both sexes were congregated together, anxious to witness the solemnities of the day. Great rejoicings took place on beholding the heavenly nuptials of so many virgins and noble matrons ; amidst which a famous weeping also was borne up to heaven. There were twelve in number, that at one time took upon them the habit of the Order of St. Augustine ; three of whom made their 'profession' the same day ; the others remaining as novices for the year. Many of these Sisters had been collected and brought from the House of Gerard the Great, which Master John Brinderinck had ruled and instructed for a long time, and which had begun to increase largely.

Thomas records that in the year 1409 the Monastery of Budiken was transferred to 'the Brothers of Common Life.' William de Monte, 'electus Padebornensis,' desiring to reform this House, converted it from the Rule of the Canons Secular to that of the Canons Regular ; and by a deed which he executed he delivered over, conceded, and assigned, the said church and monastery to John Wael, Prior of the monastery at Zwolle, according to the faculty furnished to the congregation for the purpose of gathering together devout men of God.¹

Thomas mentions also certain matters that happened this same year, in the neighbouring town of Zwolle, with

¹ See the additional *Chronicles*, by Thom. à Kempis, p. 166.

which the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes had frequent communication, and was so contiguous that they could see the tops of the houses and the spires in the distance every day. One of these events was that towards the close of the year, on the vigil of Christmas Day, Gerard Kalker, a devout priest, and first Rector of the House of 'the Brothers of Common Life' at Zwolle, died. When he first came to live in Zwolle, à Kempis tells us, he joined himself to the Brethren, and soon became one of them. After awhile, when Meynold de Windesheim, a rich man in Zwolle, built a new House as a habitation for the congregation of Clerics, and they had taken possession of it, Gerard Kalker was deservedly instituted Rector with the approbation of the majority. Then Thomas sums up his character in these words: 'He was tall of stature, of an innocent life, sweet in discourse, and of a sagacious disposition. He was collected in manner, kind to the poor, affable to strangers, beloved by the citizens, and fervently animated to gain the souls of many by Divine love. He was an active imitator of Florentius, whom he much honoured, and loved with intimate affection as a much-beloved Father. He also left behind him many devout Brethren whom he had instructed in the acquiring some of the highest virtues.' He was buried, adds Thomas, in our monastery at Windesheim, and his disciple Theodore Herxen succeeded him in the government of the House.¹

Thomas also here gives us a short memorial of another of the Brethren who died at Zwolle the year after Kalker; and from this account and others it is pretty certain that those living at Mount St. Agnes must have kept up an intimate acquaintance with the Brethren and other devout people living at Zwolle, and that they must have been mutually benefited and cheered by this interchange of godly fellowship. Thomas had doubtless often listened to his voice, and with others was edified by his fervent counsel. The name of this individual was Henry de Goud or Good, a devout priest and confessor to the sisters at

¹ See the additional *Chronicles*, by Thom. à Kempis, p. 167.

Zwolle, one of the old disciples of Florentius. He was a native of Holland, and came from the neighbourhood of Schoonoven ; and being powerful in the Holy Scriptures, he was reckoned a great preacher, and a true despiser of the world and its riches ; not fearing to condemn the vices of sinners. He showed great concern for the salvation of his neighbours by having frequent discourse (*sermocinatione*) with them ; he became a very faithful guide of the individual conscience, and the guardian of a good name and humble life. Sometimes when he came to Mount St. Agnes he would desire to speak to the Brethren separately in their cells. Among many good things which he said, I gathered, says Thomas, from one of the Brethren, that he once spake after this manner : ‘ Verily you pass a good life here, and you hold on in more secure paths, by remaining secluded from the disturbances of men. What salutary thing do I learn, who am almost daily engaged with worldly people, unless it be something about worldly matters ? I am but a plain man. I know nothing of speculative matters. I seek not to attain to high things, but I am sometimes able to make a homely sermon to the common people and to large assemblies ; but I purpose yet to amend myself more diligently, and by the favour of God to press forward to those things which are before me.’ On hearing these words the Brother was truly edified by the humble discourse of his mouth. He was buried at Windesheim, where the remains of many other devout Brethren and Priests rest in peace.

During this same year (1410) death had also entered the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes. A young Brother named Nicolas Kreyenschot, who had been but lately invested by the Prior Vorniken on the Feast of St. Michael, was called to his rest at the going down of the sun, on the Feast of St. Barnabas, at the age of twenty-three. He was of a good disposition, Thomas informs us, and through God mercifully working in him, he fulfilled many years in a brief space of time, and escaped a longer wrestling with this present world. The virtue of obedience shone in him

most conspicuously, for if anyone said to him, 'Come, brother,' did he not come, and did he not come immediately, or 'Go,' and did he not go at once? On one occasion he prepared a sharp rod for himself, and came to the Superior and said, 'I implore thee, father, for God's sake that thou wouldst severely chastise me; for I so frequently transgress, and do not advance in anything.'¹

The next important event of moment which occurred here was one of great interest, and had been anxiously looked for. Many years had the church on the Mount taken in building, and many of the Brethren had assisted in the work; and though Thomas à Kempis was more employed with his pen than in giving much help towards the erection of it, yet one can imagine with what delight he would watch its progress and completion; and how in his leisure hours he would never weary of going in and around the building to see what had been done. And now, on April 8, 1412, which was the Friday² after the Paschal Octave, Thomas says, 'our church was consecrated in honour of St. Agnes the virgin and martyr of Christ, by Matthias Buduanen, suffragan Bishop of Utrecht.' Many priests and other religious persons were present, and among them they had the Prior of Windesheim, the Prior of Belheim, Master Conrad Hengel, and John Haerlem, priest of Zwolle. And with them a large company of both sexes, of all conditions, young and old, from the towns and villages about, were gathered together to this dedication. There was much rejoicing on the occasion among all the people, and a general invitation to the feast was given to all strangers that attended. The statutes of the monastery were accordingly relaxed for that day. When the consecration of the church had been solemnly performed, the chief Pastor³ proceeded, wearing the mitre,⁴ to consecrate the four altars. In the first place he dedicated the high altar in the choir to the honour of the Holy Trinity, the blessed Mother of God, St. Agnes, and the Apostles of

¹ *Chronicles of Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xiii.

² *Pontifex*.

² *Sexta feria*.

⁴ *Infula*.

Christ. And at once, the members of the monastery being present, he solemnly chanted the mass used for the dedication. Thence he proceeded beyond the choir to the north part of the church, and there, in the greater chapel, he consecrated an altar to the honour of the Holy Cross and the blessed Martyrs. From this place he went to the middle of the church, and towards the left side of the choir he consecrated an altar to the honour of the blessed Mary, always virgin, and St. Augustine, the Father of our Order. Lastly, on the south side of the choir, he consecrated an altar to the memory of the blessed Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine, St. Cæcilia, and the eleven thousand sainted virgins. Soon afterwards the mass was celebrated at each of these altars, and the host (or sacrifice) of our salvation was reverently offered to God.¹

In the afternoon, attended by the Brethren of the Congregation, the Bishop went outside the doors of the church to consecrate a new cemetery, on the west and north sides, for the burial of the dead. He also on that day conferred forty days' indulgence on all who had been present. And to the benefactors of the church, and to all the visitors to the altars, he conceded a like grace, according to the pontifical injunctions prescribed for the consecration of a church that had been built. The Sunday after the Feast of the blessed Gallus, abbot, in the month of October² in every year, was appointed to be the anniversary of the dedication of the church and the altars. Thomas observes that it was the same day appointed for commemorating the dedication of the House of the Blessed Mary in Windesheim, and the House of the devout sisters at Dieppenheim.

In this same year Thomas records that about the same time 'the venerable Fathers of the Canons Regular

¹ 'Et hostia salutaris Deo reverenter oblata.'

² *I.e.* on October 26. St. Gall was one of the most eminent of the saints that St. Columban left behind him. He was born in Ireland in the sixth century, of rich but pious parents. He early devoted himself to God; and when St. Columban left Ireland to preach the Gospel in England and France, St. Gall was one of the twelve who accompanied him, and was the means of converting a great number of idolaters to the faith.

from Brabant attended our General Chapter at Windesheim, and were received, with the Brethren under them, into communion, and numbered with our fraternity.' He notes also, that 'at the Feast of Pentecost, in this same year and thenceforward, all the canonical "hours" of the monastery were sung in our church.'¹

Referring to the other chronicle which Thomas kept, we find mention made of the death of a friend of his, an excellent priest named Wormbold, who died at Utrecht on the vigil of St. Barnabas Day, 1413 A.D. He was confessor of the Sisters of the third order at St. Cæcilia in Utrecht. Thomas speaks of him as a burning and shining light, who kindled new life in the hearts of many of his hearers by the word preached, and who led them in the paths of a better life by his good example and salutary counsel. He was a studious lover of the Divine Scriptures, and eloquent in his discourse to the people. On account of the eminent purity of his life, he was greatly beloved and honoured by a large number of people. He wrote many books on theology; and translated many sayings of the saints into the German tongue for the use of the faithful laity, who anxiously desired to know more of God's will. At length, having laboured piously and most successfully in God's service, he drew to his end. The day before his death, our blessed Lord most benignly vouchsafed to this man the sweetest consolation, by visibly manifesting Himself to him in a certain vision. His last words in departing out of this world were, 'Since Thou only, O Lord, hast established me in hope.' His body was reverently interred in the choir of the Church of St. Cæcilia.²

Thomas à Kempis had now been nearly fourteen years in the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes; six of these had been passed in his novitiate, and about eight as Canon Regular. And it may be well for us to inquire how it fared with him in these latter years as regards his spiritual progress. If we may judge from what is written, he seems

¹ *Chronicles of Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xiv.

² *Additional Chronicles*, by T. à Kempis, chap. xix.

to have regained greater serenity of mind, and to have had his faith and hope in God more fully established, so that he could look back upon the season of spiritual distress, through which he had passed, as one of profit, and as a way through which God had been leading him to the attainment of higher degrees in grace, and to a more abiding attachment to Himself. He appears to have come to a more clear understanding of the manner in which God oftentimes deals with souls who are seeking to live more nearly with Him, and whom He would lead on to the more perfect life in Christ: and so it was doubtless that à Kempis came to be better fitted and able to speak to others about the welfare of their souls, when they sought him in like seasons of darkness and disquietude. From the time he made his vow there would seem to have been no looking back; he had put his hand to the plough, and he would steadily persevere; hence he made greater advance in grace, and in the knowledge and love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and to use the words of the Apostle, he pressed forwards towards the mark and prize of his high calling.

The contemporary biographer—whose account of Thomas à Kempis, though very brief, is generally to be depended upon—having just spoken of his investiture and the salutary effect of his soul's conflict, afterwards says: 'This Thomas quickly made great proficiency in Christian virtues, every day making some progress; still advancing in the way he had now entered upon; still adding fervour to fervour, devotion to devotion, virtue to virtue, so that all were struck with admiration at the exceeding ardour of the devout life which appeared in him. And because he was very humble, therefore was he accounted worthy of God to receive from Him very great and singular favour and grace, as plainly appears from what he himself has expressed concerning it.'¹ Here again the biographer of his day refers us to the writings of à Kempis, that we may learn more particularly what happened in his inner life.

¹ Opera et libri vitæ fratris Thom. de Kemp. Nuremb. 1494, fol. lxxxv.

And there is not much doubt as to what portions he alludes.

An interesting account of his spiritual history from this time appears to be given us by himself in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth chapters of his 'Soliloquy of the soul;' ¹ and as à Kempis lays bare his innermost thoughts and feelings, in his desire to counsel and benefit others by what he had experienced, it is advisable to refer to the accounts, since they not only enable us the better to know the saintly character of the man, but show us how we may become such as he was, in living a closer life with God.

After the words of Holy Writ, 'Behold, as the eyes of a maiden are on the hands of her mistress, so also do mine eyes wait always on my Beloved,' ² as a suitable preface to what he is about to say, à Kempis renews his discourse, as one who had got to a place where he could be safe, and rest awhile after the troubles and dangers of the way; or, as a ship-tossed mariner, who recounts the perils he has passed through, when he has reached a temporary haven where he would be, he thus begins afresh to speak of his inner life with Christ, as it were to some spiritual friend:—

From that time when I first began to love Him, I have also wished to persevere with Him. Which when I had so resolved, this very thing was so pleasing to Him that He confirmed it, saying, 'He that remaineth in Me, and I in him, bringeth forth much fruit.' ³

But that it might be proved how true, how strong, how chaste, the power of love was, it was needful that temptation should dis-

¹ Mgr. Challoner, in a short sketch of the life of Thomas à Kempis, holds much the same view, but he includes the fifteenth chapter as well as the sixteenth and seventeenth in this account which Thomas seems to give of himself. The fifteenth may have been related by Thomas after his conflict of soul, but *it clearly deals with it*, and shews how God led him out of it, and again turned to him the light of His countenance. Though one condition of soul naturally runs into the other in the recounting of them, yet an examination of the subject induces me to regard the early portion of the fifteenth chapter at least, as referring to a time of sorrow, which is again alluded to in the beginning of the sixteenth.

² Ps. cxxiii. 2.

³ St. John xv. 5.

close it. But I could not be tempted, unless He permitted it, and withdrew Himself for a season.

And because temptation is wont to be very helpful to the purifying of the inner man, and to the abundant fructification of virtues, as well as to the clearer perception of spiritual gifts, it took hold upon me, and began to try me.

How mightily and how frequently it tossed me hither and thither, my God and my Lord, from Whom no secret is hid, very well knoweth : Who is a witness of all things which are carried on in my heart. And until now He beholdeth me, and considereth me to be nothing more than a frail creature.¹

Unless therefore He had assisted me, when I was so anxiously weighed down, so that I scarcely believed that I could live, my soul had well-nigh dwelt in hell, as if I had already fallen into the pit of despair.

But He had mercy on me, Who is wont to be present with such as are troubled in heart. For who was strong enough to endure so many temptations unless God had protected and succoured him?

Of His mercy it was that I was able to stand before the face of the storm. And it comes from the gift of His goodness that I know that I still stand. Hence I ought not to put any trust in myself so long as I am in the flesh.

Even if the sky be clear, I think not that it will remain fair weather for long : for the air may suddenly be stirred up tempestuously, and perhaps when it is least of all expected.

So much the more necessary for me therefore is the grace and protection of my Beloved, as I the more truly experience that almost all things are exposed to danger. No place is safe, but heaven ; where my Beloved feeds His chosen ones in joy and gladness.²

Then there came upon him an earnest longing to flee away and be at rest 'in that bright, safe, and pleasant pasture where neither Satan nor any evil thing can enter in.' Till then, however, he impressed upon his soul that she must expect adverse temptations and great perils, but that she must not despair ; and, taking refuge in the Beloved, she must put full and unceasing trust in Him, and cry aloud to the Lord in the hour of trial. He then

¹ *Figmentum*.

² *Soliloquium Animæ*, chap. xvi. secs. 1. 2.

proceeds to speak further of God's dealings with him, after this manner :—

O how great was His mercy towards me, for even when I was ignorant of it, or did not heed it, He was with me in the trial ! For many times hath he preserved me, that I might not be delivered over to my passions.

But sometimes of His hidden judgment it came to pass that I should fall, and be overcome even in small things, lest peradventure I should become proud and be presumptuous in great ones ; so that being humbled and confounded, I might learn that I was nothing, even when I seemed to stand well and flourished most.

I advise thee, therefore, that thou shouldst not rashly or hastily praise me, although I go prosperously forward, but rather reserve thy praise for a holy end ; and then praise not me, but the Lord.

Let the glorious God alone, Who hath many times stood by me in my temptations, be praised.

For often when I was led captive by them, He mercifully set me free. And sometimes when they were coming against me as a whirlwind to carry me away, He sent forth his arrows and scattered them, He multiplied His lightnings and confounded them.

Again for a time they departed from me. Yet He would not that I should be altogether without them, because He has rarely granted this to any of His saints in this life.

After this, therefore, I enjoyed a little rest, my Beloved bestowing peace upon me ; which having nevertheless obtained, I did not give myself to bodily or worldly ease ; but I turned my mind, that so I might behold the earth from afar, and look a little into the secret things of heaven.

I then designed with myself also, to see what kind of person I was, and by what means I could better please Him, Who had shown me so many tokens of love, so vastly exceeding my deserts.

For it was not in the whirlwind of temptation that I was able to see how sweet my Beloved was, but in serenity of mind and in the quiet of solitude.

And, as far as in me lay, I did desire this serenity of peace without intermission ; that I might more perfectly cleave to Him, and wait upon Him, without any hindrance or trouble.

But the effect of grace does not always follow according to the desire of the soul. Yet sometimes the desired sweetness is granted, sometimes it is very rightly delayed.

Nevertheless, who would not rather choose to rest under the shadow of the Beloved, whilst it were permitted, and whilst time and opportunity would admit?

But now my Beloved behaveth interchangeably with me: neither do I always perceive what disturbs me, nor do I incessantly enjoy that which delights me; but the evening and the morning become one day, because the whole of this mortal life is spent in going and returning through things joyful and sorrowful.

Truly was that Saint sensible of this who said, 'Thou visitest him betimes in the morning, and suddenly thou triest him.'¹ Nevertheless it seems in some measure a rest, when temptation is not too continuous or importunate.

When, therefore, it is given me to rest sweetly even for a little season on my Beloved, I enjoy that which is altogether pleasing and acceptable. In this I rejoice, yea and ever will rejoice in so Divine a gift.²

The lights and shades of the interior life appear in the many changes of trial and ease, sorrow and gladness, the consciousness of the presence or absence of the Beloved; and an attentive reader will readily perceive many fine touches and affecting moments in the soul's history of this renowned but humble-minded saint, whilst he observes what an amount of real spiritual experience of the highest character is laid bare to his view. We proceed, however, with the words of à Kempis:—

Moreover, it is no small privilege that I am permitted to address Him (the Beloved) on any occasion whatever, because He has so often freely anticipated me with His gracious visitations.

Furthermore, when He draws nigh, and is minded to keep holy day with me, immediately a light shines in my heart, before the brightness of which the dark vapour of all vain thoughts is driven away, and the long wished for serenity is possessed.

For at His entering nothing that is shameful or indecent can remain, because He is the Lover and Engrafter of purity. Moreover every illusion of the devil with all the pomps of the world must depart forthwith.

When, therefore, my passions and the temptations which I had endured were thus subdued, I began to recognise Him more

¹ Job vii. 18.

² *Soliloquium inimus*, ch. xvi. 4, 5, 6.

clearly, and to love Him more fervently : I endeavoured likewise to give Him hearty thanks, that now, at length, He has vouchsafed to keep from me the commotion of sins.

For they were often wont to break in upon my peace, and strove to shut my mouth, so that I could not speak to my Beloved.

But fruitless were their endeavours against His power and wisdom, Who in the midst of any commotion can glide into ¹ my heart, and silently infuse into me His secrets, so that I can count all their whisperings as nothing, and do not inwardly attend to them.²

Then he breaks forth into this fervent prayer, which seems to come from a full heart :—

O my Beloved, most dear, most beautiful, take me, I implore Thee, so to Thyself, as often as Thou shalt see my affections pressed down by any weight of sin, or held back by any useless occupation, so that I may not begin to wander away further from Thee after crowds of evil thoughts, and thereby be suddenly deprived of Thy grace, without which I shall not be able to continue in Thy most excellent friendship. For Thou art my Lord, and my God, Who healest and hallowest all things by Thy Word ; Who hast appointed my soul for life, and hast not suffered my feet to be moved, but hast delivered me from the evil hour, and hast extricated me from the snares of death.

O how many have been forsaken, and have perished, who were more innocent than I ! Bless, then, the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Whatsoever Thou sayest, or thinkest, or offerest in praise, all is far too little, and comes exceedingly short. For greater is He than all praise, and sweeter than all melody. Therefore my soul cleaveth unto Thee, and loveth Thee over and above all Thy gifts, though beautiful and sweet is every thing that Thou hast out of charity bestowed upon me. For Thou alone art the Bridegroom ; the rest are presents and tokens of Thy love. I will not love them instead of Thee, nor will I believe that all things can suffice me without Thee, lest peradventure I lose at once both Thee and them. Thou permittest me to use many things for Thy sake, but Thou wouldest not that I should enjoy any of these things instead of Thee.

Therefore, my Beloved Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, I have pre-

¹ 'Potest illabi.'

² *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xvi. 7.

ferred Thee to all, and have striven to love Thee beyond all else. Grant me, then, happily to enjoy Thee, and in fruitful union with Thee I may be made happy for ever together with Thee.¹

As if he had been lost to all things else whilst lifting up his soul to his blessed Saviour, he now again recollects himself, and, as it were, apologises for thus delaying his discourse; for he says, 'But, pardon me, my friend. For the love of my chief and only Friend hath some little carried me away; and would to God it would raise me up still more, and lift thee up also on high in like manner. Let Him prepare us for a heavenly ascent; but let us keep a humble descent.' He then again proceeds to speak of himself, as if in answer to an inquiry of his friend:—

Thou askest, if I am sometimes left by the Beloved. I answer, Yes!

And then the friend, whom he has as it were permitted to learn the secrets of his inner life, puts the further question to him, 'What doest thou meanwhile?' And then Thomas tells him in these words:—

I sustain myself with as much equanimity as I possibly can, and so I wait till He comes again. I am weighed down in nature, but in spirit I am inwardly upheld; otherwise my grief would be insupportable.

Then I remember, that there is no living in love without some grief. I live by faith, I believe the Holy Scriptures, and I assent to their consoling words. And though for the present it may be bad with me, I do not doubt, neither ought I to doubt, but that it will yet become better.

True and faithful are those things which are narrated in the sayings of the Saints; for they were exercised and proved in many such like ways: Nature ever wishes to be relieved, and seeks to be comforted somehow. But the spirit, nevertheless, is ready to endure all things, whatsoever God would have me to suffer.

If then I should sometimes be indeavour and sluggish in the performance of good works, yet is my wound not without a remedy.

'Though He slay me,' saith the righteous, 'yet will I trust in Him.' If I love virtues, patience is a great virtue; let it now therefore be in some measure preserved.

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, cli. xvi. sec. 8.

For the difficulty of a work frequently increases the lustre of the virtue ; but that the virtue may be proved, and be made brighter and brighter, it is generally tried by contraries.

When such a trial, then, comes upon thee do not doubt, neither be cast down, but preserve thy patience, and commend the righteousness of God.

God is not so severe and unmerciful that He should suffer thee to remain long disconsolate. Only take heed that thou do not grieve immoderately, and that thou murmur not against the righteous and Holy One, because thou art left.

Lest the evil spirit assail thee with bitter temptations to despair and blasphemy, and being too fearful, thou be more tormented by them, than it behoveth thee to be.

Therefore bear thyself up a little while, and suppress thy grief, whatever be the heaviness of mind or pain of body that is forced upon thee.

Continue firm in the good resolution, which thou hadst determined to keep from the beginning. For it is especially helpful in such a crisis to cast all thy hope on the Beloved.

Patiently wait for heavenly consolation, and thou shalt soon receive more abundant grace, and experience the favour of God. Behold thou hast a faithful witness, saying, 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me.'¹

But that thou mayest ere long be enabled to obtain it, pray more constantly, ask others to pray for thee ; and thus commit thyself wholly to His will and ordinance, that He may do with thee as seemeth still better to Him.

And say to Him with good confidence, 'My times are in Thy hands. Thou knowest how it is with me ; Thou knowest what I suffer ; and if Thou wilt I shall very soon be comforted.

'Nevertheless, let that always be done which seemeth good and right to Thee, but have mercy upon me, a poor and desolate beggar, humbly groaning unto Thee.'

If then thou shalt persevere in patience and endurance, and wilt not swerve because of a little tribulation from the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus, verily the splendour of His grace shall assuredly return unto thee, and more abundantly enlighten thee.

And the Beloved shall be much dearer to thee on His return, than if He had never been absent. For His sentence is not irrevocable ; nor is He so angry that He cannot any more be reconciled.

¹ Ps. xl. 1.

He will be the more quickly and more easily appeased provided only thou do thy endeavour, and be more watchful, and very early perform what thou hast undertaken to do.

If thou dost acquiesce in these salutary admonitions, then the Beloved will be with thee as aforetime, and in His presence thou shalt rejoice and say, 'O how plentiful is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, O Lord; which Thou hast provided for them that trust in Thee; Thou shalt hide them under the shadow of Thy wings.'

O Sion, thou shalt be renewed, and shalt see the glorious One, Who is to reign in thee. He is the King of virtues, and thy Beloved, Whose hinder parts are of pale gold, and Whose head is of the finest gold.

These words are said for thy consolation. Tell them but to very few. And the rest which hath been promised touching the changes of the Beloved, viz. as to how He at one time manifests Himself, and at another runs from thee, thou shalt receive and hear from His own mouth in the narrative that follows.¹

Along with the history of his inner life, Thomas à Kempis intersperses many wise admonitions which are of incalculable worth to those who are anxiously desirous of attaining to the stature of perfect men in Christ, and to that peace of mind which passeth all understanding; since much of the welfare and even perseverance of the soul consist in knowing how to meet trials of various kinds and to bear them aright; especially that apparent desertion of the soul, which is one of the most critical periods of its probation. Then the evil one suggests thoughts to us to give up being truly religious, and to find our happiness in the world. 'What is the use of serving God? Why make your life sad with religion? Why not enjoy life? Is not the love of Christ for you personally but a dream? Why should He concern Himself about you?' Ah! it is a fearful season of temptation! But it is at such periods that souls are proved, whether they be faithful or not. For how many there are, who so long as they have sensible devotions, and some fervour of soul present with them, serve God with alacrity, pray willingly, joyfully engage in

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xvi. secs. 9, 10, 11.

good works, and seem to live in great peace of heart ; but as soon as God hath thought good to withdraw that sensible feeling of devotion they are presently troubled, become chafed and impatient, and at last heedless of their prayers and other religious exercises ; and thus, as our Saviour says, 'in the time of temptation fall away ;' they perniciously betake themselves to external consolations, and seek their happiness in temporal enjoyments. Whereas, if they loved God purely for Himself and not selfishly for His gifts merely, they would still cling to Him, even when those gifts or internal consolations were withdrawn ; they would still trust in God and wait upon Him ; wait His time and good pleasure, saying with the Lord our Saviour, 'Not my will but Thine be done.' And thinking of His other comforting words, 'Let not your hearts be troubled ; ye believe in God, believe also in Me,' they would still hold on their way, still hope in God and abide patiently on Him. Thus 'they shall not be confounded in the perilous time, and in the days of dearth they shall have enough.' Committing themselves to God's care, they will still possess their souls in patience, and persevere in their devotional exercises until it pleases God to visit them again with the light of His countenance and the sweetness of internal devotion. In the meantime they will humble themselves before God, confess their unworthiness, mortify their carnal desires, submit themselves willingly to God's dispensation, thirsting and longing for His presence again. This subject is of such momentous import that à Kempis would have us to receive instruction relative to it, as if from the mouth of Christ Himself. It is such as he himself seemed to receive ; and he communicates it to others as coming from our Lord rather than from himself. It is therefore here given without abbreviation, since it is the most precious counsel of all that he has to give. After the words of Holy Scripture, 'Marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well,'¹ he introduces it with earnest

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 14.

inquiries to the Beloved, which serve as a preface, and call forth a divine reply :—

Why is it, my Beloved, that Thou hast thus dealt with me? Why hast Thou left me? Answer me. Thou didst leave me and go away : and then Thou returnedst again. And in this Thou hast done well.

If Thou hadst not come again soon, I should well-nigh have fainted. But being conscious of my secrets, Thou hast had mercy on me ; for I was sorrowful at Thy departure, and am now comforted at Thy return.

Tell me however something for my instruction, and what good Thou intendest herein? What advantage is it for Thee to run away and afflict me? Doth it not delight Thee to hear, ‘Abide with us, Lord, for it is towards evening’?

Come and sit in the midst of us : for lo ! I, and another disciple, desire to hear Thee ; and we beseech Thee earnestly that Thou wouldst teach us. Speak freely what Thou pleasest : and if Thou wilt, address Thy words to me.

No one would I more gladly hear than Thee. And if anyone else speaks, his discourse becomes both agreeable and audible to me, because of Thee, Who speakest in him.

The words of Thy lips, however, will be sweeter to me than honey and the honey-comb, for they surpass all sweetness of words. Let now Thy voice sound in mine ears.

Then *the voice of my Beloved* thundered and said, ‘I am He that speaketh in righteousness. Who is like unto Me in counsel and wisdom?

‘Who made the sea and the dry land? I, the LORD, forming the light and creating darkness.

‘Who entered into the abyss, and brought up water from the deep? I, the LORD, Who searcheth the hearts and reins.

‘Who knoweth all things, both the first and the last? I, the LORD, Who made all things in number, weight, and measure.

‘I am the Creator of heaven and earth, the Governor of all worlds. I am the Discerner of all secrets, and the Revealer of what is hidden.

‘I encompass the whole universe, and comprehend the cause of every single thing.

‘I am GOD, and I change not ; with Whom the reasons of all wonderful things do unchangeably subsist.

‘I am GOD, omnipotent, Whose power is illimitable. I am the Most High, Whose height is unattainable.

‘I am GOODNESS, Whose Being is incommunicable. I am ever present, yet most secret.

‘I am most intimate, and yet most removed from the senses. I carry all things without being a burden, rule all things without dissension.

‘I behold all things equally at once, both the past and the future, as well as the present. I alike comprehend all bodily and spiritual creatures.

‘I am named in various ways, yet cannot be truly grasped by any thought. I suddenly appear, and ere it is known, conceal Myself.

‘Verily I am a GOD that hideth Himself, and dispense My visitations to those that love Me in a thousand ways.’

The Beloved spake also to the loving soul, saying, ‘I will hide my face from her for a little while ; I will leave her for a moment, that I may see whether she purely loves Me.

‘It is a great matter to love purely, for this is to love Me, not on account of herself, nor for any temporal advantage, or spiritual comfort ; but to love ME only, for My own sake, and finally herself on account of Me, and not for anything that she hopes to obtain from Me.

‘It does not appertain to all thus to love Me ; but this prerogative of pure love is solely the property of a most perfect soul.

‘But that soul which is as yet imperfect, hath need to be frequently proved and aroused, that she may know how much she loves, and if she hath yet learned to despise herself.

‘For thou saidst in thine heart, “I love indeed.” And frequently didst thou repeat the same, “I love.” But I believe not in words or thoughts only. Therefore in the truth thereof will I prove thee.

‘When I am present and speak fair to thee ; when I bestow devotion, or increase the gift ; when all is prosperous and for the most part I am pleasant to thee, then thou devoutly sayest, “My Beloved, I love Thee.”

‘And thou sayest well ; for I am very lovely ; and all things that can be said or thought of Me are lovely and sweet, and for ever praiseworthy.

‘But what great thing is this, to love and praise Me only for kindnesses ? For even sinners do this. They often truly bless Me when they receive what they desire unrighteously. But praise is not comely in the mouth of a sinner.

‘Whosoever then loves Me for the sake of a benefit or consola-

tion, what does he more than the covetous? Advance, advance, and ascend to greater perfection.

‘Be ashamed to be always weak and effeminate : learn to eat solid food, and not to be fed any longer on the milk for little children. Pass over to the number of the mighty men of David, of them that take hold of the spear, the sword, and the shield.

‘Take up thy cross, and follow Me. Make haste to be reckoned among those who know how to bear divers troubles and many kinds of exile for My sake.

‘Thou art bent too much on comfort. Therefore I will prove thee, and incline to the other side, that thou mayest know what thou canst suffer, lest thou seem to thyself innocent and holy.

‘I will send upon thee tribulation, and anger, and indignation, and the inward assaults of evil angels. Some shall take away what is thine ; others shall deny thee what thou needest.

‘Some shall calumniate thee ; others oppose thee to thy face. Some shall impose upon thee a heavy yoke ; others lead thee whither thou wouldest not.

‘Some shall afflict thee outwardly ; and others inwardly. Others shall be preferred to state and honours, thou shalt be left to contemptuousness and labours.

‘In all these, as in greater than these, thou shalt be tried as a strong athlete. I will withdraw, nor will I dismiss thee before I have thoroughly tested thee, whether thou wilt still bless Me to My face.

‘For if thou lovest Me with all thy heart, and blessest My name at all times, then art thou worthy to be called My bride, and to obtain a secret chamber with Me.

‘And if thou art not able as yet to bear My rod, and shalt deem My discipline too severe, bemoaning My absence many days, whilst unceasingly and diligently seeking Me, I will give thee My staff that thou mayest rise.

‘And after this I will come, and thou shalt be restored to the former grace. For I would not have thee faint altogether, since I love him that loveth Me.

‘And if thou dost not yet love perfectly, still I do not despise the little one ; but will take care that thou growest. My care for thee is that thou mayest do well, I would not therefore that thou have any hesitation concerning Me.

‘I know indeed how much thou art able to bear ; and therefore do I temper My visitation, that thou mayst be able to endure when tempted, and not fail.

‘If however I shall make some delay, wait for Me till the day of visitation ; I will indeed come and make good My promise.

‘ But do thou pay attention to prayer, be diligent in sacred reading, and in all things hold fast patience and longsuffering.

‘ For I am not ignorant, that during My absence thou art in grief ; but it is certainly not pleasing to Me that thou art so soon cast down, and givest up all hope, as if I should not return.

‘ Where is thy faith ? ¹ Great faith thou hast especially need of in this state ; because although thou seest Me not, thou art seen by Me, to Whom thou shouldst commit thyself and all that thou hast.

‘ For although thou knowest not My judgments, yet a firm faith says :—“ Whatsoever God disposeth and worketh is good.”

‘ I comfort thee therefore, because this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.

‘ I have taken from thee the object of thy desire, because I wished to prove thy faith and thy love.

‘ All this I did that thou mightest more fully know thy own weakness, and more clearly understand My goodness. Thou knowest not thyself so well as I know thee.

‘ I know thee and all that is thine, not only in time but from eternity. Acknowledge then what it is that cometh from Me to thee : see how poor thou art in thyself, if at any time thou art left by Me.

‘ Thou hast not yet advanced enough in the true knowledge of thyself : and because it is highly expedient for thee to know this, I desire that thou shouldst learn it by experience.

‘ It is good for thee that thou art sometimes desolate, that thou art troubled, that thou art humbled, so that thou mayst quake at the greater manifestation of thy peculiar infirmity. I know that this tends the more to thy advancement.

‘ And if thou shalt from this become more prudent and watchful in every particular, what hast thou lost ? Thou art oftentimes too arrogant and ignorant of thyself, thinking thou possessest some good which thou hast not.

‘ Thou art deceived by self-love : and whilst thou forgettest the Giver, thou abusest the gift. I have inebriated thee, but thou forgettest that it was a cluster of grapes from My vine.

‘ Prove thyself a little ; know what strength thou hast ; if what thou hadst was of thyself, why didst thou not retain it ? And since thou couldst not retain it, acknowledge that thou hast received it from above.

‘ Give thanks, then, and confess that without Me thou canst do

¹ *Ubi est fides tua ?* This very expression is found in the third book of the *De Imitatione Christi*, ch. xxx. sec. 2.

nothing. Consider how necessary I am to thee, how sufficient, and how only powerful to confirm thee in all good.

‘Where wast thou before I called thee but in thy sins? And where art thou now, but whither I have brought thee? Yea, and when was it well with thee without Me?’

In answer to these inquiries of the Beloved, the soul thus addressed is constrained to respond, and says, ‘Never, sweetest Lord. Thou alone altogether, and singly, art my Beloved; most faithful in all things, and above all?’

Then another question comes from the Beloved: ‘Why then didst thou not think right with thyself, that thou wentest after other lovers? What was displeasing to thee in Me? Was it My Glory or My Beauty?’

And the reply to this, as if deeply conscious of the awful majesty of the Beloved, is:—

Truly, O Lord, there is none like unto Thee for beauty and for glory, for riches and power in heaven or on earth. Thou alone art the highest above all creatures.

The heavens are Thine, and the earth is Thine: Thou hast laid the foundations of the round world and all that is therein. Much hast Thou given to Thy creatures.

In them Thy great beauty, wisdom, and goodness shine forth; but then it is nothing in comparison of Thy blessed and glorious presence.

I have now learnt by experience, that it is a bitter thing for me to have left Thee even for an hour.

And now again, as if listening for the voice Divine, Thomas tells us what instruction he received in these words:—

Return therefore unto Me, saith my Beloved. It is enough that thou hast until now run about hither and thither. Learn to be steadfast and meek, hoping and trusting in Me, not only in the day of visitation, but more abundantly in the night of temptation.

I left thee, that, being wearied, thou mightest the more quickly return to Me; and being disappointed in thy outward consolations, thou mightest understand how great a blessing My love, which so often invited thee, hath conferred upon thee.

Consider, therefore, now—for it is not without a reason—wherefore thou art sometimes left, that thou remainest without affection, that thou art afflicted with weariness:

That thou art oppressed with temptations, that thou art cast about hither and thither ; that thou findest no counsel, neither feelest any help, but sufferest straitness and want on every side.

I leave thee, then, that thou mayest know that My presence is necessary to thee ; not only in one thing, or even so much in great matters, but truly in every action, in every place, and time : in the morning as well as in the evening, and wherever thou art, or goest, or stayest.

Thus indeed shalt thou be instructed to walk more carefully with thy Beloved ; to abstain from vanities, and to beware of giving offence.

I leave thee that thou mightest know how much thou lovest Me ; that is, that the measure of thy love may be seen.

Thou didst esteem thyself to be stronger and more blessed than thou really wast ; but it became evidently clear, that when My help was taken from thee for a little while thou wast poor and miserable.

After what manner could thy love be made known, unless it were when thou shouldest bear heavy afflictions with meekness ?

Sometimes I see thee lukewarm ; but that those mayst be stirred up to fervour, and diligence in seeking Me, I conceal Myself for an hour, as a lover standing behind the wall.

I see, and I know all things ; but exercise is profitable for many things, and often gives greater insight. Moreover, if thou lovest Me, thou wilt not delay to seek Me. If I please thee thou wilt seek for Me more eagerly.

Knowest thou not that riches gotten with labour, are held fast with greater eagerness ? To whom is rest so desirable, as to the weary traveller ? To whom is love so pleasant, as to the lover who has previously endured grief ?

And a treasure that is regained, is it not twice as dear as it was before ? A double joy and abundant gladness return, because the presence of the Beloved has been intermitted.

For thy profit, then, I withdraw myself ; and I do this not because of any displeasure, but for a certain gracious dispensation do I sport with them that love Me.

Let this suffice for the present, because thou art worthy to hear this much.

But I give thee leave to return to Me, as often as thou feelest it to be needful. I have never shut up My bowels of compassion against those that humbly and earnestly supplicate Me.¹

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xvii. 7, 8, 9.

Here this Divine conference comes to a close. The words, occurring in the sublimest episode of the spiritual history of à Kempis are too sacred almost for common ears, and should be received with becoming reverence and in thoughtful silence.

From this time, it would appear, that he gradually regained his composure and peace of soul ; the crisis was passed, 'his heart is established and will not shrink.' Come days of darkness, come torrents of afflictions, he will still hold fast by God, and trust in His love and mercy. Though still walking humbly with God, this trust grows continually into a settled conviction with him, and in due time the fruit appears, in a life-long devotion to his God and Saviour. To this more settled frame of mind I shall have occasion shortly to refer. But now for awhile I turn to other matters.

CHAPTER XX.

Events, 1414-1425—À Kempis admitted to the Priesthood—Begins the first books of the 'Imitation'—A memorial of Gisbert Dou—A memoir of Father John Ummen—Account of several other Brothers who died—The death of the Prior of Windesheim—The visit of à Kempis to him previously, and the vision he had—À Kempis elected Sub-prior—The duties of this office—His sermons—The monk's little alphabet—The mystic character of his religion—His devout communion with his Saviour.

IN the year 1414 Thomas à Kempis, when about thirty-four years old, was ordained Priest. He does not make any special record of it, though in his writings he several times alludes to the fact of his being a priest; and to the high importance and responsibility of the office in his estimation. In his 'De Augustissimi Eucharistiæ Sacramento,' which forms the fourth book of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' when speaking of the dignity of this sacred ordinance, and the reverence which is due towards it, he thus refers to the priesthood, and plainly intimates that he himself was numbered in the holy order:—

For this is not due to the merits of men, that a man should consecrate and handle the Sacrament of Christ, and receive for his food the bread of Angels.

Grand is this Mystery; and great is the dignity of priests, to whom that is given which is not given to Angels.

For only priests, rightly ordained in the Church, have the power of celebrating and of consecrating the Body of Christ.

The priest indeed is the minister of God, using the Word of God by the command and institution of God; but God is therein the principal Author, and invisible Worker, to Whom all that He wills is subject, and to Whose command everything is obedient.¹

Take heed to thyself, and see what this ministry is, which has

¹ It may be well to notice how strictly this passage, alluding to the two chief duties of the ministry, is in accordance with the words of the prayer for

been committed to thee by the laying on of the hands of the Bishop !

Behold thou hast been made a priest, and consecrated to celebrate the Sacrament ! see now that thou faithfully and devoutly offer this Sacrifice to God in due time, and that thou behave thyself so as to be unblamable.

Thou hast not lightened thy burden, for thou art now bound by a stricter bond of discipline, and art under an obligation to lead a higher life of sanctity.

The priest ought to be adorned with all virtues, and afford to others the example of a good life.

His conversation should not be in accordance with the common and ordinary ways of men, but with that of the Angels in heaven, or that of perfect men on earth.

The priest arrayed in the sacred vestments is Christ's representative, to pray humbly and suppliantly to God for himself and all the people.¹

Further on in the book the author makes some additional observations in the same high tone of spirituality ; thus he says :—

Above all things it behoves God's priest to come to the celebrating, handling, and receiving this Sacrament, with the deepest humility of heart, with suppliant reverence, with full faith, and with a pious regard to the honour of God.²

Many other sacred instructions follow in the same chapter, which may very fitly be addressed to all persons who come to receive the holy Sacrament ; but in another chapter he still further shews us what a lofty conception he had formed of the sacred office, and of the godly life that should be manifested by those who are made priests when he says :—

O how great and honourable is the office of priests, to whom it is given to consecrate with sacred words the Lord of Majesty ; to pronounce the blessing with their lips ; to hold Him in their

the Church militant, where it says : ' Give grace, O heavenly Father, to all Bishops and Curates, that they may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth Thy true and lively Word, and rightly and duly administer Thy holy sacraments.' And also, with what is said in the XXV. Article, that God thereby ' doth work invisibly in us.'

¹ Chap. v. secs. 1, 2, 3.

² *Ibid.* chap. vii. sec. 1.

hands ; to receive Him into their mouths ; and to administer Him to others !

O how clean ought those hands to be, how pure the mouth, how holy the body, how spotless the heart of the priest into whom the Author of purity so often enters !

From the priest's mouth, which so often receives the Sacrament of Christ, nothing should proceed but what is holy, nothing but what is virtuous and edifying.

His eyes should be simple and chaste, which are accustomed to look upon the Body of Christ.

The hands pure and lifted up towards heaven, which are wont to handle the Creator of heaven and earth.

To the priests, it is especially said in the law, ' Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'

And then follows this earnest prayer :—

Let Thy grace assist us, O Almighty God, that *we who have* undertaken the priestly office, may be enabled to serve Thee worthily and devoutly, in all purity and good conscience.

And if we cannot live in so great innocency as we ought, still grant us, at least, duly to weep for the sins we have committed ; and in the spirit of humility, and with the full purpose of a good will, we may be enabled to serve Thee more fervently for the time to come.¹

Such are the views which Thomas à Kempis undoubtedly entertained with regard to the office of Priest which he had undertaken. And we cannot doubt from what is known respecting him, that he constantly endeavoured to act up to, and live according to the exalted instructions and sentiments which he uttered.

The year after he was ordained he began to write his first Missal, and finished it in the year 1417. There need be no question about this, as the author has in his possession a facsimile of a portion of it, with Thomas à Kempis's name which he subscribes to the work, with the date when it was finished. It is written in a large bold hand, and so well formed are the letters and words that it appears very much like the printed pages of the earliest printed books, when the letters were not altogether well formed.

¹ Chap. xi. secs. 6, 7, 8.

It was shortly after his entering the priesthood also, it is estimated, that he began to compose the first books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' It is said that about the year 1410 there appeared abroad certain short treatises of devout meditations, which were attributed to him, and which were much read and esteemed. This may be the reason why Sphanhemensis speaks of Thomas à Kempis as 'flourishing' in the year 1410.¹ His name, it is said, was not attached to them as he was far from being ambitious of honour in the world, or seeking to acquire reputation in the Church by what he had written. But, however much he endeavoured to conceal himself, the name of the author became known, especially among the members of the Brotherhood, and through them to others, so that unconsciously as it were, and without his seeking, he became eminent, and men began to look to him for further instruction in the way of righteousness, and to learn through his words what God had revealed to them in His written Word. Thomas à Kempis eminently became a minister of the Gospel, not so much at first it may be in the way of preaching to the people—though this came afterwards in some measure—as in unfolding to the minds of men, and enforcing upon them, through his writings, how they might truly obey the Word of God, and become real followers of Christ, their Lord and Saviour.

It was this that induced and incited him, doubtless, when he had been made priest to give his utmost attention to produce something of pre-eminent worth—to put forth all the powers of his soul and mind so as to give of the best he had to God's service ; to bring out of his treasures which he had carefully gathered the choicest gems of sacred learning, to polish them afresh, to add to them from his own experience in religion, and set them in order, so that they might take hold of those who heard or read them, and convert them to the obedience of Christ. He was one of those of whom it may be truly said, he did not bring of that which did cost him nothing, but he brought

¹ I. Badius Ascensius, *Vita Thom. à Kemp.*, chap. xii. sec. 5.

pure oil, well beaten, as an offering to the Lord, for the use of the sanctuary, to cause the lamp of truth to burn brightly, and therewith to guide souls into the way of peace. He sought not to produce learned or subtile treatises on Divine subjects, but studied to write what was plain and simple, so that the humblest child of God might understand, and that, according to the words of the prophet, he that runs—however busy a life he may be leading—may read the Divine precepts. He was nevertheless one of the thinkers of his time who loved his fellow-men, and who in the silence and solitude of his chamber sought out suitable words that he might win them to a better life, and make them more truly sons of God and heirs of eternal life.

It was this that led at length to the production of his choicest work, which now forms the book called the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*.’ Though he still fulfilled his daily task of copying manuscripts to assist in supplying the wants of the monastery, yet, as he could not be thus employed during all the hours of the day, and would often have his mind free to range and dwell on any subject that much engaged his attention, it is pleasing to remember that his thoughts and spare moments during this period of his ministry were mainly occupied and given to the composition of his inestimable work. Tolensis, who was a Brother in the Monastery of St. Agnes after the death of Thomas à Kempis, tells us that it was a customary thing for him while in bed during the night to compose, and to write books after morning ‘lauds,’ thereby depriving himself of his natural rest, and injuring his bodily health, for which he deserves well of all those who cultivate piety.¹ And when we consider how clearly ideas and thoughts spring up in our minds, and present themselves to us in fitting and most forcible words whilst we sometimes lie awake on our beds, how even matters that have perplexed us, and about which we have been anxious and uncertain during the day time, have been wonderfully solved by us in the night season ; and how a plain way, or the right words to

¹ Francisc. Tolensis, *Vita Thom. à Kemp.*, sec. 10.

say, have been presented to us, we have not much difficulty in picturing to ourselves how it was with à Kempis in the production of his great work—how greatly his soul was possessed with the desire of producing words that might be of real value to the saving health of his beloved Brethren, and to all others who earnestly sought to live righteously and godly in this present evil world. We can imagine him awaking in the night with this idea pressing upon him, how he would devoutly ponder over solemn subjects that would come up before him—perhaps, at first, some of the words of Holy Scripture or of holy worship, which he had lately listened to, or written out, the precious counsels of his pious Brethren, or the Fathers of the fraternity from whom he had learnt so much, or some of the sayings of ancient sages, with which his mind was well stored, especially those of Pythagoras and Seneca—and then how the sacred wisdom, distilled into his mind, as it were from on high—for he was ever seeking the presence of the Holy Spirit in all he wrote—would shape itself in terse and epigrammatic sentences, and be conveyed in simple, few, yet weighty words. And then in the early morning, after he had paid his homage to the Most High, how he would at once put down on paper whilst still fresh in his mind the well thought-out passages, or counsels of Christian perfection, which had been conceived within him. Little by little would these sentences increase—for it must be remembered that his composition was not rapid, since he put down nothing but what had been well pondered over and matured in his soul—and then gathering these scattered and occasional pieces together, he would eventually weave them with admirable skill into one or other of the short devout treatises for which he was so famous.

The composition of the books of the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*’ would not, however, extend over more than nine or ten years, for we have ample evidence that three of them at least were completed by the year 1425, if not a year or two before. I must, however, recount some of the events which happened in the meantime, and are recorded by à

Kempis. This will bring us to the narrative in which mention is made for the first time of the books of the 'Imitation.'

The first matter that I notice during this period is, the account which à Kempis gives of the death of one of his pious friends at a distance, with a short memorial of his character. This was Gisbert Dou, or Dove, the Rector and Confessor of the Sisters in Amsterdam, who died in the year 1420, on the day of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. We are told that he was a priest of venerable life, and had been the promoter and founder of two of the Reformed Monasteries of the Canons Regular. This man of God had from the beginning of his conversion been very closely connected with Gerard the Great, and had become one of his most intimate friends. For he was better acquainted with the secrets of Gerard's life than the rest of mankind; since he was his confessor, and the most faithful reposer of those things which arose from the unburdening of his conscience. Hence he held with Gerard the most devout intercourse, often having conferences with him respecting the condition of the Brothers and Sisters, and concerning the preservation of the New Devotion, as it was called, which had been commenced in several places. And owing to the abundant goodness of God he lived in excellent health many years for the consolation of good men. Frequently did he preach the Word of God to the people; and was a kind and generous entertainer of all who came to him. He was a faithful helper of the poor, a sweet consoler of those in trouble, and a thorough friend of the 'religious.' He was held in great esteem by the powerful, and was listened to with reverence by the learned and the Prelates (the Presidents or Priors of the monasteries). And having completed the seventy-fifth year of his life, he died in a good old age, and was buried with the Fathers, among the saintly Sisters of the Order.¹

We have also the record of another intimate friend of à Kempis, to whom he says he has already referred in his

¹ Additional Chronicles attached to those of *Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xxii.

Chronicles,¹ who died the same year (1420), in the month of September, on the night of St. Ægidius, Abbot. This was 'our beloved Father John Ummen, the first of the founders of the Monastery at Mount St. Agnes.' As he has been named before, I shall only here give such additional items or observations respecting him as may be of interest. He was born of respectable parents, his patronymic was Regheland, and he was educated at Zwolle. He became a devout and faithful servant of Christ, a favourite disciple of Gerard the Great, and constantly went to hear him preach when opportunity offered. From a certain infirmity in his youth, by God's will he was afflicted with obscurity of vision, and eventually became blind, and remained so to the end of his life. Yet, as Thomas has it, by Divine grace he was so much the more clearly illuminated inwardly, in proportion to his being unable to see outward things. His mother had dedicated him to God, and often journeyed to long distances with her son for the sake of visiting the places sacred to the memory of Saints, leading him by the hand all the way, taking him with her to hear sermons in churches, and inducing him to seek after every good thing. When however the venerable Master Gerard came to preach, and many individuals through the inspiration of God were pricked to the heart, the Lord also opened and inflamed the heart of this man to be His servant, and he sought further instruction from this excellent preacher. From this time he gave up his pilgrimages to the shrines of the Saints, and studied to serve God in all tranquillity of soul, exhorting all who came to him, that, despising all earthly desires, they should lay hold of the new life in Christ, and live holily, as Master Gerard taught them.

Therefore, associating himself with certain other individuals of good desires, he began in Zwolle to live with them the common life. Afterwards, indeed, wishing to dwell beyond the tumult of the world, they began to

¹ And this is one of the proofs we have that these additional Chronicles were written by Thomas à Kempis.

inhabit Mount Nemel, which is now Mount St. Agnes. Here he greatly enlarged the congregation which he governed with faithful devotion until the foundation of the monastery was laid—not being daunted by the many obstacles thrown in his way. When at length the monastery was begun, and the Prior canonically instituted, this man, full of brotherly love, and guided by an enlarged ardour of soul, undertook with certain of the older lay Brethren to found a new congregation near Vollenhoven, to the praise of the Holy Trinity ; and by the favour of God it was productive of large increase. Here also in process of time, when the Brethren had multiplied, he, with several others, took upon him the habit of the third Order ; and thus this humble Brother remained their president and first Rector to the end of his life. Through the spiritual intercourse which he held with Master Gerard he learnt the art of a holy conversation, and by his advice and direction fully submitted to his new way of living. This Father John was a true ‘devotee’ and worthy to be remembered ; for in the earlier days of his conversion he daily made advances towards perfection and attained to maturity in the Divine favour. He was an eminent lover of holy poverty, a guardian of humility, a friend of sobriety, an ornament of modesty, a pattern of simplicity, a staunch upholder of discipline, an enemy of vice, a luminary of virtue, an example of devotion, and being strong in faith, persevering in hope, and diffusive in charity, he converted many people from the vanity of the world.

He grew feeble in old age, especially as he drew near to the time of his dissolution, and became sick unto death whilst ruling over the Sisters of Almel. And having consummated his seventy-fifth year, he fell asleep in the Lord, and was buried in the same place, in the chapel of the Sisters.

After his death Thomas adds that one John de Resa, a devout priest, was appointed to succeed him as the second Rector of the House ; and that he sought and obtained many privileges which were necessary to that

House, including the consecration of the cemetery by the venerable Bishop of Utrecht.¹

Thomas à Kempis then notifies that in the following year (1421) a disastrous plague broke out in Deventer, Zwolle, Campen, and the neighbouring towns, which happened in the three summer months, and cut off a great number of people from the earth. And further on he tells us, that in the month of September in this same year, whilst the grievous pestilence still prevailed, several of the fraternity were attacked by the disease. We have an account of several of them, and as they are short memorials of real saints with whom Thomas was well acquainted, it will be interesting to hear what he says respecting them.

During the octave of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary a certain layman, Nicolas by name, our miller,² a native of Drenthius, died shortly after high mass. He had a good reputation and was beloved by all in the House.

On the festival of St. Lambert,³ Bishop and Martyr, our Brother Octbert Wild, a fervent and devout priest, died about the hour of vespers. The Brethren were present with him in his last moments, and prayed with him, according to the accustomed manner. He was in his thirty-eighth year and the fifteenth of his profession. He was a citizen of Zwolle, was born of truly worthy parents, and took our patroness St. Agnes the Virgin for special devotion. In early manhood he endured many infirmities and temptations, but afterwards by the help of God he was changed into another man, and wonderfully relieved from cowardice of soul. Being frequently filled with the grace of devotion he happily attained a good reward. His body was buried the next day on the east side of the cloisters, after mass had been said.

On the feast of St. Michael, after vespers had been said, Nicolas Peter, our carpenter, died. He was a big man and naturally very powerful. He had been an inhabitant at Mount St. Agnes for more than twenty years as a lay

¹ Thom. à Kemp., *Chronicles of Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xv.

² *Molendinarius noster*.

³ *I.e.* September 17.

Brother, and was a native of Monekedam in Holland. He left behind him a good memorial of his skill and industrious labour in the building of the church, and in constructing the new seats in the choir for the Brethren; his body was interred in the cemetery of the laics, next the pathway towards the north. Thomas à Kempis in one of his sermons to the novices or younger Brethren, 'On daily bearing the Cross,' gives an anecdote respecting him. After mentioning him by name—and this leads me to the conclusion that these sermons must have been delivered some time after his death—he says, 'Though a good carpenter, he determined in his mind by the inspiration of God to forsake the world and enter into our monastery. When therefore he was approaching it, and alone in the way, the devil was laying in wait to tempt him, and he began to feel uneasy and to fear much, knowing not what should hinder him in the good path, whilst the sun was still shining brightly. He stood still, therefore, and deliberated within himself what he should do, when he could discern no one present; he began to think that, perchance the devil wished to prevent him proceeding further to the monastery. Looking around then, here and there, he saw at a distance as it were a small black cloud arise from the earth, and by degrees it began to increase in height, and moved towards him as if agitated by the wind. Being much frightened, and conjecturing that Satan was hereby endeavouring to hinder his journey, he immediately raised his hand to make the sign of the holy cross, that he might arm his forehead with the sign of salvation. And thus casting off his fear he was comforted with a strong faith; and again signing his forehead with the cross he went manfully on. Which being done, that diabolical apparition, unable to withstand the virtue of the holy cross, declined from the road, as if to avoid a sharp arrow hurled against it, and presently, like evanescent smoke, disappeared.¹ Then much joy ensued, and he boldly

¹ This anecdote reminds one of what befell Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, when he met Apollyon; how greatly he feared him, but yet manfully

entered our monastery, dedicated to the honour of St. Agnes the Virgin, which at that time had been commenced in great poverty and was known to few. While living here many years, he fasted every Friday in honour of the Holy Cross; and even in the time of harvest, though wearied with great labours, he never omitted the fast of the Holy Cross, but kept constantly to the resolution which he had well begun.¹

In the same year on the festival of St. Jerome,² à Kempis records, that about the close of the forenoon, Riguin de Urdinghem, the ministrant of our sick, who had been vouchsafed to us, expired between the litanies, after a brief interval of pain. He was a native of the diocese of Cologne, had lived twenty-five years in the Mount, and had never during this time visited any friend, nor seen the land of his nativity after he had left it. In three things he was graciously heard by the Lord before his death. For first he desired to die in bright daylight; then that all his Brethren should be together with him to assist him in his last moments; and, thirdly, that the agonies of death should be short. All which came to pass, by God's disposing providence, as he had desired in pious simplicity.

On the festival of St. Luke the Evangelist,³ Adam de Herderwick, our lay associate,⁴ who tarried twenty years in this place, died. This devout man, and faithful in the business of the House, occupied himself with various duties and undertook some troublesome matters. He was compassionate towards the poor, and kind towards those in any tribulation: and in this sad season he gave special attention to looking after our sick Brethren. His body was buried in the cemetery of the laity, near the other

fought against him and conquered, and then went on his way rejoicing. The design is doubtless to illustrate the manner in which the true Christian is at one time or another, in many instances, opposed by the devil in his way to heaven, and how he must fight against him under the banner of our salvation and overcome by faith.

¹ Ser. ad Novit., part iii. I. On the text, 'but God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Gal. vi. 14.

² *I.e.* September 30.

³ *I.e.* October 18.

⁴ *Donatus noster.*

associates. And then, adds Thomas, 'after his burial, by the mercy of God, the pestilence ceased. And certain of those who had been infected by this plague, recovered from their sickness.'¹

We may well imagine what an anxious and sorrowful time it must have been for Thomas and the Brethren, first one and then another of those who were living with them being seized and carried off by this terrible epidemic. It was a season to call forth all their faith and trust in God, which they were ready to exercise; and so this severe ordeal was doubtless sanctified to the good of those who had been spared.

In the year following (1422) there died William Seger, priest and confessor to the Sisters in Hasselt; and though he did not dwell with them at Mount St. Agnes, yet Thomas notes his death because it was at his own desire that he was interred in their cemetery; for he was laid in the east portion of the precincts, facing the Prior's cell. Many venerable and celebrated men came to the funeral, and the Brethren in the Mount with their Prior faithfully performed the offices of devotion.

It is to be observed that à Kempis notes down several important events that happened about this time in the country where they dwelt, which shows that he was far from being unconcerned about the welfare of the people of the land. Thus he tells us that in the same year, during the days of Pentecost, peace was confirmed between the inhabitants of Utrecht, Holland, and Gelderland. And that this was a cause of much rejoicing, because for many years they had exhibited great enmity towards each other, which led to sad scenes of plunder, slaughter, and fire.

In the month of September, on the day for commemorating the martyrdom of SS. Cosmas and Damian,² there

¹ Thom. à Kemp., *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xvi.

² SS. Cosmas and Damian were two brothers, and both skilful physicians. They lived in Cilicia, and were highly esteemed by the people for their kindnesses and good offices, and for their zeal in propagating the Christian religion. When the persecution of Diocletian arose, they were apprehended, and, after suffering many torments, were beheaded for the faith of Christ. (September 27.)

died at Thabor in Friesland, Brother John Pric, a priest and monk of the House of Mount St. Agnes. He was a citizen of Steenwick, and was for some time vicar of the church of St. Stephen in that place. After many years he made a request of the Prior of the monastery at Thabor that he might henceforth live with the Brethren of that House ; which was accordingly granted. When the pestilence broke out it carried off several of the Brethren, and among them was Brother John, ' who also fell asleep in the Lord,' and was buried in the east part of the precincts with the other Brethren who died. A famous saying of his to the novices was, ' He who in the beginning of his conversion does not accustom himself to humble exercises, and does not effectually suppress or keep in check his natural desires, will rarely become a good "religious!" ' In the same year two of the *Conversi* were invested with the Order, viz. Gerard ter Mollen and Gerard Hombolt.

In the year 1423 there was so severe a cold and frost during the winter, that a great mass of frozen ice covered the low lands. This lasted to the month of March, when the snow and ice suddenly melted, and there followed a great inundation of water, which rushed impetuously over the plain, and much seed being thereby immersed, perished in the waters. In the summer of this year, continues à Kempis, the boundary wall of our monastery was finished from the east side to the west, and new gates put up.¹

In the following chapter of the Chronicles there is a record of the character and death of the chief Bishop of Utrecht, Frederic von Blankenheim, in the year 1423 ; I need not here repeat what is said respecting him, suffice it to say that he was much esteemed by the Brotherhood, and his death much regretted ; the Brethren felt it the more because the election of his successor led to much bitter dissension among the people, and was the cause of great trouble and persecution, which fell heavily on à Kempis and his Brethren at Mount St. Agnes, and Windesheim. But more of this presently.

¹ *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xvii.

In the year 1424, on the first Sunday after St. Andrew's day, the venerable Father John von Huesden, the second Prior of Windesheim, died. He was a disciple of Gerard and Florentius, and governed that monastery by the grace of God thirty-three years. He was profitable to the whole Order, and was a most benign and consolatory Father to all the devout Brothers and Sisters throughout the entire diocese, holding all in common charity; he was an ardent lover of the Scriptures, and wrote out many books for his monastery; his favourite divine was the Father St. Augustine, of whose works he procured a copy with great perseverance. He along with John Wale, the venerable Prior of Zwolle, was summoned to attend the General Council of the Church held at Constance, where they were kindly and reverently received by the Cardinals and other prelates. Thomas à Kempis appears to have had a remarkable presentiment or revelation of his death a little while previous to its taking place. There is some interest attached to the notice of it as it took place during a visit which à Kempis made to the Windesheim monastery; and I shall therefore give his account of it.

It happened that a few days before the Prior died, after the octave of St. Martin, Bishop,¹ that two Brothers of Mount St. Agnes went to Windesheim, for the purpose of consulting the Prior. And on that occasion one of them—which was Thomas himself, though he keeps himself as usual as much hidden as possible—whilst sleeping there the same night, had a singular presage of the future. For he saw in the heavens an assembling together of spirits, as if they were hastening to the death of some one. And immediately he heard in his sleep a sound on the table, as if he were called to the departure of one dying, that he might be aroused to keep watch. Rising, therefore, from his bed, he was desirous to go and ascertain what this might be, but he could perceive no one. For it was before five o'clock in the morning, and the Brethren were all yet resting quietly. Returning, he silently began to think

¹ Bishop Martin's day was on November 11.

within himself, that peradventure our Father, the Prior, would in a short time take his departure to heaven. Still he related to none in that House anything concerning the vision; but to one cleric that had come from Brabant he said privately whilst going with him in the way, 'Say to Master Hermann Scutken, who has been delayed in Thenis, that if he desires to speak to our Father at Windesheim he must come quickly, because I judge that he will not live a long time, if the vision be true that a certain person saw this night.' Fifteen days after these things had happened the Reverend Father died, soon after high mass had been performed. Mass for the dead was chanted for him in the monastery, and his body was buried in the choir before the steps of the sanctuary.¹

I cannot let this account pass without making one or two observations respecting the object of Thomas à Kempis's visit to the Prior of Windesheim. It may have been the occasion when the General Chapter of the Canons Regular which assembled every year was held at this mother House of the Brotherhood; and when Thomas, with another Brother, who had been selected by the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes, had come to attend it, as their representatives. And there seems to be some probability that this might have been the case, since we hear of a Brother from Brabant being there also. Or, it might have been that Thomas à Kempis and the other Brother from Mount St. Agnes had come to consult the Superior of the Order about some matter relative to their own House; and why is it that Thomas is sent, when as yet he does not appear to have held any official post in the monastery? He was certainly shortly after this made Sub-prior, as we shall see, but not yet. And one or two things suggest themselves as likely to have been talked over with the Superior. First, whether Thomas should not be selected and urged to accept some post of usefulness in the monastery, whereby his ability and influence might prove of more value to the Brethren. Or, secondly, it might

¹ *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xix.

have reference to matters concerning the depositing of some three or four of the books of the 'De Imitatione Christi' in the mother House with the approval of the Prior. I am led to this conjecture because a copy of them, written out by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, was left there about this very time, as seems pretty certain from the following testimony.

There is extant in the Bourgogne Library at Brussels, numbered 15,137, a manuscript copy of the three first books of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' bearing the date 1425. It is not written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, but it has this important attestation, evidently authenticating the copy written by him, at the time when the copy was taken from it; it runs thus:—

Notandum quod iste tractatus editus est a probo et egregio viro, magistro Thoma de Monte Stæ Agnetis et Canonico Regulari in Trajecto, Thomas de Kempis dictus, descriptus ex manu autoris in Trajecto, anno 1425, in sociatu provincialatus.

Which has been thus rendered:—'Let it be observed that this Treatise has been composed by a pious and learned man, Master Thomas of Mount St. Agnes, and Canon Regular of Utrecht, called Thomas à Kempis. It has been *copied from the manuscript of the author* in (the Diocese of) Utrecht, in the year 1425, and in the Society's House of the Provincialate.' This is only one out of the many and various kinds of testimony in support of Thomas à Kempis being the true author of the 'De Imitatione Christi;' yet it alone, when all the circumstances are taken into account connected with it, ought to convince reasonable men that he indeed composed the work. In the year 1775 the Abbé de Ghesquière wrote a book about this (1425) manuscript. But a hundred years before this Hesurus wrote about it in his 'Hecatomb,' and states that one David Ehinger, of Kirchheim, asseverated these three things concerning this MS. of the three books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' *First*, that the name of the author, which it bears written upon it, is Thomas à Kempis, Canon Regular in the Diocese of Utrecht.

Secondly, that this copy (of 'De Im. Ch.') was transcribed from the autograph of Thomas à Kempis himself. And *lastly*, that it bore the date of the year of our Lord 1425.

Now this is conclusive evidence that a copy of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, was deposited in the Provincialate House of the Canons Regular at Windesheim, about the time we name; and when we bear in mind the date of Thomas à Kempis's visit, the year before, it seems very probable that it was deposited there by Thomas à Kempis himself, at the desire, or at least with the approbation, of the Superior of his Order. For it should be remembered that the above assertion of David Ehinger was given and written down before the heat of the controversy about the authorship of the book came on; and that the said book was, before that dissension, acknowledged to be the work of Thomas à Kempis; it was known, valued, and commented upon, as his.

There is a curious story told about this manuscript (called the Kirchheim MS.), which is related elsewhere, and to which, along with a specimen of the writing of the MS., I must refer those of our readers who are interested in such matters.¹

It should here be noticed, that in this same year, 1425, Thomas à Kempis began another important labour that occupied him no less than fifteen years. One work is no sooner accomplished than another is undertaken by him. And this was nothing less than the writing out of the whole Bible in Latin in a fair large hand. I have already alluded in one or two other places to this blessed work, which extended to four folio volumes; and what I have additionally to observe is this, that another object of his visit to the Prior of Windesheim might be, and probably was, to procure the loan of the best amended edition of the Holy Scriptures; for one of the chief employ-

¹ Ghesquière, *Dissertation sur l'Auteur de 'l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ.'* A Verceil, 1775. See the *Authorship of the 'De Imit. Christi,'* pp. 269-280; Rivingtons, 1877.

ments of the more learned of the Brethren at this mother House of the Order from the beginning had been to collate the various manuscripts of the Bible, and settle, as far as their judgment served them, what was the correct text to use. In this arduous undertaking they had done a great work in their day and generation, endeavouring as far as in them lay to give to the world at large, no less than to their religious Brethren, the revealed will of God contained in the Bible in as clear a light and in as correct a version as it was possible for them to do. It will be remembered that in the lives of Gerard, Florentius, and other Fathers of the Common Life that were learned, great pains had been taken to procure good manuscripts of the Bible, and that they had pressed forward the work of revisal as a matter of singular importance. And now Thomas à Kempis, one of the best of the caligraphists, was about to write out a capital copy of the whole Bible, for the use of the Brethren of the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes; not only for their own reading, but that other Brethren might copy it out also, or portions of it, for their own use and for distribution. For permission to have the successive parts of this Bible, to make his copy from, may very likely have been one of the objects of his visit to Windesheim on the occasion when he had the vision. Be this as it might, it seems very probable that the getting the several portions of the Bible to copy would necessitate visits to Windesheim from time to time.

I must now return to the account of the history of things that happened after the death of the Prior, John von Huesden, as related by Thomas à Kempis, for he and the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes were intimately concerned in them. After the death of the venerable Father, Brother Gerard Naeldwïc, who had been the Procurator or Bursar of the monastery, was elected Prior on the vigil of the Epiphany of our Lord. He was much grieved that he had been chosen, and unwillingly consented. But being of a meek and obliging disposition, impatient alike of honour and responsibility, he humbly besought the members of the community at the next assembling of the General

Chapter, with much urgency and with many prayers, to be relieved of the care of so great a government, and to be set free from the Priorate; and after some consideration among the Brethren, he had his desire granted. When he was liberated Brother William Vorniken, Prior in Mount St. Agnes, was elected at the same sitting of the General Chapter by the Fathers of the congregations still assembled. Consternation, however, seized upon him when he perceived that he had been elected—not without cause fearing the formidable burden. He wept moreover much, exclaiming aloud that he was unworthy; and urgently endeavoured, by every possible means, and with many reasons that he urged, that he might be excused. But being constrained by obedience and by the authority of the majority, he was compelled to yield assent and undertake the yoke of so great a burden for Christ's sake. His election being confirmed, he was duly inducted into the office of Prior, and all in that House gave thanks unto God and rejoiced. But, adds Thomas, there was no little distress of soul and weeping at Mount St. Agnes that their faithful Pastor should be taken from them, because another like unto him was not known.¹

In another chapter Thomas proceeds to tell us concerning the election of a successor to Vorniken, their Prior, in the year 1425. The House of Mount St. Agnes, he says, being destitute of a pastor by the election of him who had been taken from it, and translated to the superior House, it was necessary, according to the canons, to provide another suitable person as Prior. The Brethren therefore being assembled, and the mass of the Holy Spirit having been celebrated in the convent on the Sunday after Whitsunday, the heads convened a chapter of the whole House. And by the voice of every one present Brother Theodoric Clives, our Sub-prior, was elected. At this election the Prior of Windesheim, who had but lately been Prior at Mount St. Agnes, and the Prior of the House of the Blessed Virgin, near Northorn, were present, who confirmed the

¹ Thom. à Kemp., *Chronicon. Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnetis*, chap. xix.

said election, made in due form according to the authority invested in the body. This Brother Theodoric was one of the older Brethren, and among the first that had been invested in this House ; he had for a long time been held in great esteem, and had written homilies for summer and winter, with certain other books.

The sub-priorate then became vacant, and it was the custom of the Prior to choose one, with the approbation of the Brethren, to hold the office, to assist him in things spiritual relating to the House, as the Procurator or Bursar did in things temporal. It was at this time, in the year 1425, that Thomas à Kempis was chosen to be the Sub-prior at Mount St. Agnes. Those present were well aware that there were few persons better fitted for the office, or one whose influence for good would be more truly felt, and there is little doubt that they approved and rejoiced in the selection of their Brother, who had now been nearly twenty-six years with them in the monastery. He was at this time forty-six years old, in the best of his days, well experienced, matured in judgment and in the knowledge of the Divine life. This office led him to have the charge and training of the novices, and to be brought into intimate relation with them ; for alone with the Prior he had to take a prominent part in upholding and advancing the spiritual welfare of the community. This would oblige him to promote conferences on sacred subjects among the Brethren ; to animate them to the performance of their religious exercises both in the church and in their cells ; and on certain occasions to preach to them from the pulpit. There are extant three sets of his sermons to novices, and one set to the Brethren, which he appears to have delivered to them during the time he held this office, now and on a later occasion when he again filled it. I shall be able to give a specimen of his sermons to the former when we come to speak more particularly of his preaching. But here we must content ourselves with giving the prologue which Thomas à Kempis has prefixed to his sermons for novices. It is as follows :—

To my beloved Brethren in Christ, to Innocentius, Simplicianus, and other disciples of the Crucified One, diligent disciples of our holy religion : your Brother pilgrim dwelling in the vale of tears humbly asketh the assistance of your prayers.

May the peace of God abound in your hearts, and manifold patience be granted to you and to me in the cross of Christ.

These sermons, which, in the manner of an agreeable collation¹ for our novices, delivered at various times indeed, I have collected together, and deemed it right to communicate them to you in love, thinking it a pious act. Although the language, then, may be uncultivated, and the matter not very deep, yet, desiring to please the single-minded, I willingly offer to the pious and devout for perusal, that which the Lord has inspired and given. If perchance an indiscreet word shall offend any one, I beg that pardon may be granted to a little one ; and what seems to sound absurd to those abroad in the world shall be amended. And since examples often move hearers more than words, I have therefore—instructed by the custom of B. Gregory—in several places at the end of my sermon, for greater attestation, briefly noted some examples as they occurred to my memory. Accept, gracious Brethren, what I offer to you as dear friends. Pray that all things may be done to the glory of God and the advancement of many.²

It was in the discharge of the duties of his office as Subprior, and in order to make his efforts for the good of those he had to watch over more successful, that he was led to draw up a short and concise Form of rules or precepts, which he could propose and offer to those who had recently come among them, and desired to conform themselves to the principles of religion which the Brotherhood of Canons Regular had in this place adopted. The Form is found among various other smaller writings of à Kempis ; and something of the kind was probably sketched out for himself when he first set himself to be a pattern of what a Christian monk should be, the which he afterwards more carefully and pointedly revised when he found it might be useful for others who were like minded. It is entitled by him 'The Little Alphabet of the Monks in the School of Christ : ' and the

¹ It must be remembered, from what has been previously said, that this term used among them signified a sort of familiar private address.

² Thom. à Kemp., *Opera omnia*, Colon. 1769, col. i., *prol. pars prima ser.*

precepts are all such as may well be used by those who are ardently endeavouring to follow in the steps of Christ ; though there are some few which may not be received with favour by all. Having these rules in a condensed shape before their eyes, à Kempis designed that those who had dedicated themselves to a religious life, should constantly keep them in mind and continually endeavour to be conformed to them.

There is something peculiar in this Form, which reminds us of a like composition in Holy Scripture, viz. that of the cxix. Psalm, where, as every student of the sacred volume knows, the initial letter of each verse in the several sections of it are appropriated to the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet ; and by some this Psalm has been called the ‘Saints’ Alphabet.’ Whether this Psalm suggested the idea or not, something similar to it is adopted in the ‘Monks’ Alphabet,’ though it is not so perfectly carried out, or to the same extent : for here under nearly all the letters of the Latin alphabet some godly counsel is given. It commences with this short prayer :—

Shew me, O Lord, Thy ways, and teach me Thy paths.
Yea I beseech thee, O my God, instruct me in the ways
of a good life, for the saving of my soul.

Then follow the words of the Master :—

- A. Love to be unknown, and to be accounted for nothing ; for this is more healthful and more useful to thee, than to be applauded of men.
- B. Be thou Benevolent to all, both to the good and to the evil ; and be Burdensome to none.
- C. Keep thy Heart from wandering thoughts ; keep thy Mouth from vain speech, and all thy senses under the rein of discipline.¹

¹ The words in Latin, with which the first counsel begins, are, *Ama nesciri* ; the second are, *Benevolus esto* ; that of the third, *Custodi cor tuum* ; and so on, taking up the letters of the alphabet consecutively as the initial letter in each of the sentences. It is to be observed that the first sentence under the letter A, viz. *Ama nesciri, et pro nihilo reputari*, is one of the few expressions which is found word for word in the *De Imitatione Christi* (lib. i. cap. ii. 3).

- D. Love solitude and silence, and thou shalt find great peace, and a good conscience; for in a multitude there is much noise, and a great distraction of the heart.
- E. Choose Poverty and Simplicity, and be thou content with a few things, and thou wilt not soon be given to murmur.
- F. Shun conversation with worldly men, for thou art not able to be satisfied with both God, and men; with things eternal, and things transitory.
- G. Give thanks unto God always from the heart, as well as from the mouth, even in trouble and in sorrow; for God providently disposeth all things in the world, with a true and righteous judgment after the counsel of His Eternal Wisdom.
- H. Humble thyself in all things, and humble thyself to all; and thou shalt be deserving of thanks from all. Thou wilt also be acceptable to God, and beloved of men; the devil will quickly flee from thee, because of the virtue of Humility, which is wholly contrary to him.
- I. In every good work have a pure intention to please God, Who is the Inspector of the heart, and loveth the just and pure.
- K.¹ Account such as persecute thee, and speak evil against thee, as thy rarest friends and benefactors; for if thou rightly judgest and considerest the matter, thou canst acquire great gain thereby. For they who oppose thee in what is evil, are profitable to thee for what is good.
- L. The kingdom of God is obtained by labour and pains, by tears and cries. Paradise is lost by delights and honours.

The instruction had been drawn from the writings of St. Bernard, who, in his third sermon on the nativity of our Lord, says, 'Tu ergo, qui Christum sequeris, absconde thesaurum. *Ama nesciri*; laudet te os alienum, sileat tuum.' It had been thoroughly received among the Brothers of Common Life, and the words *Ama nesciri* had become proverbial among them. See John Buschius, *Chronicon. Windes.*, p. 242; and Thom. à Kemp., *Chronicon. Mt. St. Agnes*, p. 13. It is one of those small points which identifies Thomas with the Brothers, and strengthens our belief that he was the author of the *De Imitatione Christi*.

¹ Not finding a suitable word in Latin under the letter K, a word having another letter is supplied with which to begin the sentence, viz., *Rarissimos*.

- M. A great gift of God it is to be poor in this world for Christ's sake, and to keep to the lowest place. The devil is continually tempting thee to seek after high things, to go about after honours, and to avoid what is despised ; so that the climber may fall down backwards, when, after a brief space, he has had dominion over the poor. Account the least gift as great, and thou shalt be accounted worthy to receive greater.
- N. Despise no one : hurt no one. Condole with the afflicted ; assist the needy ; and never for doing this extol thyself.
- O. Let thy whole time be usefully spent with God ; for nothing is more precious than the time allowed thee to obtain the kingdom of God in perpetuity. Exhibit also to all men a friendly, courteous, and affable behaviour. Every good work refer to the glory of God ; and do nothing without counsel and deliberation.
- P. In every work thou undertakest, always in the first place inquire whether it be pleasing or displeasing to God. Do nothing against thy conscience either for fear or love. In matters that are doubtful have recourse to the Holy Scriptures and the obedience due to thy superior ; and do not confide too much in thyself. Learn to be silent rather than to speak ; and be willing rather to be instructed than to teach ; for it is safer to be hid than to appear.
- Q. Do not give thy judgment in other matters which do not appertain to thee, neither do thou intermeddle with them, if thou wouldst always have peace. He who zealously follows the common duties of life, and avoids singularity, will be more beloved, and will more quickly arrive at a good end.
- R. Return to the interior matters of thine heart, and shut the door of thy lips. Do not begin to wander after the various desires of the world, when the devil tempts thee. Listening to evil things is hurtful to the soul ; the beholding of beauty is a temptation, and the bearing of censure is disturbing. Depart therefore from the

passionate man, from the ignorant and dissolute also, and abide alone with God in silence.

S. Be temperate in thy diet, modest in thy apparel, prudent in thy words, honourable in thy behaviour, deliberate in counsel, strong in adversity, humble in prosperity, grateful for benefits, cheerful under contempt, patient under pain, and discreet in everything thou doest.

T. Fear to offend God, even by the least neglect or defect in thy duty. Do not presume when things are prosperous, neither despair when things are adverse. The fear of God will make thee depart from what is sinful, and will solicit thee to engage in every good work, that the good thou doest may be well done.

V. Sell all thy advantages to God, and He will give thee better in one hour, by His grace coming to thee. No one is so rich, no one so free, as he who hath given himself, and all that he hath to God, and hath bought Christ by loving Him, Who hath redeemed the world by His Cross.

21.¹ Let Christ be thy Life; let Him be thy Lesson; let Him be thy Meditation, and thy Discourse; let Him be thy Desire, thy Gain, thy whole Hope, and thy Reward. If thou seekest anything else but God purely, thou wilt suffer loss; thou shalt labour and shalt find no rest.

22. The singing of Hymns and Psalms is the work of Monks and Clerics, with whom the choir of Angels rejoice, while praising God continually in the Kingdom of Heaven.

To serve the flesh is the death of the soul, is to make food for worms, a nest for devils, a life like that of the beasts, and fuel for diseases, is the corruption of bodies, the defilement of manners, the destruction of all that is good, the acquisition of innumerable evils and sorrows.

To serve God, on the other hand, is the blessedness of the soul, the health of the body, the skill of the spirit,

¹ Here two letters are at fault, but, to make up the number of the alphabet to the twenty-three letters, two lessons are here introduced, which I have numbered 21 and 22.

yea it is life. He sings sweet hymns to God, who always praises God in the midst of his tribulations. The beginning and end of every good religious life, is to love God from the heart, to praise Him with the mouth, and to edify his Brethren by his example.

Z. Come down, Brother Zaccheus, from the height of human knowledge. Come and learn in the school of God the way of humility, meekness, and patience; through which, by Christ teaching thee, thou wilt be able at length to attain to the glory of eternal blessedness.

THE CONCLUSION.

Write, O new monk, this Alphabet in thine heart, as in the book of Life. Every day look into thy paper (*chartulam*) and accustom thyself to good manners. The words are few, but they have a deep mystery; and set forth the labours of those that attain to perfection. They serve to adorn the exterior, and give rest within. From a contempt and abnegation of thyself the life of a good religious monk begins, and is carried on, until he comes to the very vision of God.

THE BENEDICTION.

Blessed is that Disciple who follows Christ, through the rough way; committing himself to Him, not choosing or refusing anything for himself; but bearing his cross daily, for Christ's sake, that he may with Him obtain great glory and Eternal Life. Amen.¹

In these terse, practical directions given in this Monk's Alphabet, and in the fervid emotions of the interior life of à Kempis exhibited in some of the Soliloquies lately brought before us, we have the very essence of that Scriptural and practical Mysticism which, in common with the Brothers of Common Life, he cultivated and enforced. And it is not too much to say that all real and earnest

¹ Thom. à Kempis, *Breviora opuscula complectens. Alphab. Par. Monac.*, vol. ii. 262-264 Som. ed.

religious life will more or less partake of this mysticism ; for there is indeed in the religion of Christ a mystic power, a grace given and obtained of a supernatural kind, to those who endeavour to conform their lives to the example of their Lord, and truly seek His presence and help. And this presence and help of Christ is only to be fully obtained by consciously coming to Him, and by living in accordance with His holy will. Mysticism, in fact, asserts that we may hold personal conscious communion and intercourse with God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; and that the Holy Spirit will be imparted in some mysterious manner to those who earnestly desire to follow His guidance. It is but asserting in a more distinct and forcible manner the truth and requirements of God's Word, that they who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth ; and that God delights in such, and will come to them and make His abode with them. It is the recognition of a most wonderful and gracious element in the religious life, that the infinitely great and incomprehensible Ruler of the Universe, Who made us and daily sustains our life and the existence of all living things, will condescend to hold communion with us, and of which, by some inner perception, He frequently gives us certain knowledge. Are we not told by Christ Himself that if we keep His commandments and love Him, He will love us in return, and manifest Himself to us ? And when one of His disciples wished to know how this marvellous Presence should be realised, while the world should be unconscious of it—unable to comprehend it by any natural law—He but affirmed the truth more fully, by saying, 'If a man love Me, he will keep My words : and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make our abode with him.' ¹

This internal manifestation of the Divine Presence in the soul of the true believer is not a matter to be explained ; sufficient that it is promised and has been realised by the true followers of Christ ever since He made the promise. Previous to these words, when speaking of the coming and

¹ St. John xiv. 23.

indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Christ said, 'At that day *ye shall know* that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.' And in accordance with these words St. Paul says, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.'¹ And St. John in the Book of Revelation tells us how Christ, after His ascension into heaven, confirmed His word of promise by saying, 'If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him, and he with Me.'² Quesnel says, 'God alone can enable us to comprehend what it is to contract as it were a friendship with Him, to receive Him into our heart, and to entertain Him there in majesty and greatness.' And though we cannot understand this marvellous conscious communion with the Most High, we need never doubt but that God will be true to His word, and that there is a deep reality in the promise, which every true child of God may ascertain for himself. This is a matter which St. Paul seems to reaffirm, when saying to the Christians of Corinth, 'Ye are the temples of the living God,' he adds, 'as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people.'³ Now this is the loftiest conception of Mystic truth which à Kempis and the Brothers of Common Life fully accepted and endeavoured to realise, and which led them to put so much heart and soul into their religion ; for in their hands it was safely guarded from the excesses and errors to which the profession of it was sometimes exposed.

They insisted and taught that this high privilege could not really exist, or be maintained, without observing the conditions of the Gospel, and that those who would enjoy the promise must fulfil the precept. None but those whose hearts were filled with the love of Christ, and were endeavouring to keep His sayings, must expect to have His presence and favour with them ; and that if they did not strive to become like their Lord and Master, and to love Him purely, they would only be deceiving themselves by imagining they could hold fellowship with Him.

¹ Rom. viii. 16.² Rev. iii. 20.³ 2 Cor. vi. 16.

And this Scriptural Mysticism which the Brothers of Common Life embraced, and which à Kempis largely taught in his works, and especially elaborated in that most acceptable of all his works the 'De Imitatione Christi,' was as the infusing of new life into the religion of those days. It was much needed amid the darkness, deadness, formality, superstition, and corruption that prevailed.

It said in substance that no mere attachment to the Church, or obedience to her priests, would avail for a man's salvation unless he lived a new life, and shewed that his heart was in the service of God. It profited little to engage in a gorgeous ritual, or to observe numerous ordinances. Something more and infinitely greater was needed for the welfare of the soul, and that was the new life—the effort to live according to the precepts of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Those who, like à Kempis, adopted the mystic life, did not want to overthrow the Church, but to have it reformed and renewed after its primitive purity; they did not slight the ordinances of God and Divine worship, but truly valued them and encouraged attendance upon them. What, however, they did require and sought after was that the heart should be engaged and not that a mere outward service should be paid, or accounted sufficient. They did not despise learning or a systematic study of Theology, but vigorously did their part in promoting both one and the other; but what they zealously contended for was that these things could not be put in the place of religion, any more than a faith without works, or fervent feelings without the practice of Christian virtues.

It was not sufficient to be deeply read in patristic lore, or to have a large and accurate knowledge of religious truths; very excellent as these were, they would be all of no avail and only lead to self-deception, unless the heart were inflamed with the love of God, and the life conformed gradually to His holy will. But if a man were fully devoted to Christ, if he were sincere in his religious profession, if the work of sanctification were truly going on

within him, and manifesting itself in his daily life; why then should he be content with a lower kind of religion, why should he stop short of enjoying the higher blessings of the Christian life—the promised fellowship of Christ our Lord, the entering into that rest which remaineth, in some measure, for the people of God, even in this life? This is only the natural outcome and result of the interior life—of a life hidden with Christ in God. It is without exaggeration, and without presuming on more than is written and held out to us in the Gospel, the fruit and blessing of one thus thoroughly devoting himself to Christ and living to Him: it is a high and happy state of soul, to which all true Christians, however unworthy they may feel themselves, should aspire, and which they may moreover realise in their own breasts, and keep for themselves as a glorious possession, an inestimable privilege, though it be one of which the world knows little or nothing, and regards with something like derision.¹ This mysticism points to a secret

¹ Some very apposite remarks are made upon Mysticism by the late Dean Waddington, who cannot be accused of having any sympathy with the Mystics, but speaks from a just sense of what was due to them, notwithstanding the errors and excesses some were led into, and may here be fitly noticed. After giving some warnings against the vagaries of the wilder sort, he says: 'In a religious society, the purest characters are commonly those who shun celebrity; it is rare that they throw their modest lustre on the historic page. On this account it is that, while the absurdities of Mysticism are commonly known and derided, the good effect which it had in turning the mind to spiritual resolves, and amending the hearts of multitudes imbued with it, is generally overlooked.'¹ In another place he says: 'Under the respectable name of Mysticism much genuine devotion was concealed, and many ardent and humble aspirations poured forth before the throne of grace.'² And noticing its prevalence in the Church at all times, he says: 'The aspirations of Mysticism, sometimes degraded into absurdity, sometimes exalted into the purest piety, have unquestionably pervaded and warmed every portion of the ecclesiastical system, from the earliest era even to the present.'³ I am indebted for these quotations to Mr. Overton, who, in his work on the *Life and Opinions of the Rev. William Law*—which came into my hands after I had written this work on à Kempis—ably examines the prejudices against Mysticism, and shews what account is to be taken of them. One passage from his work I may be allowed to quote on this subject, as it falls in so much with my own views: 'It will have been gathered from the preceding pages that I have a deep, but

¹ Waddington's *History of the Church*, chap. xxvi. p. 608.

² *Ibid.* chap. xxviii. p. 700.

³ *Ibid.* p. 708.

source of spiritual power within the soul, a Divine power on which the Christian life depends; it speaks of Christ living in the heart, of Christ being the centre of the Christian's affections and hopes, the strength and life of his inner existence.

These remarks have been drawn forth because we have now arrived at that period in the life of à Kempis when he must be more fully regarded in the light of a Christian Teacher; and it is important to bear in mind that the Mysticism of which mention has been made was one of the chief characteristics of his teaching. It is clearly and frequently manifest in his writings; it is represented in the Interior life which he advocates, and which he also practised. An illustration of this in the life of à Kempis was given at the beginning of this work, which shews how greatly he valued it, how gladly he availed himself of it, and how sensitive he was of it. I allude to the habit he had of withdrawing himself from his Brethren, as if from a sudden impulse, when he felt any devout inspiration come upon him, or earnest longing to hold communion with Christ; for regarding it as a call from Christ, he would ask permission to retire and then return to his cell. This shewed how truly à Kempis realised and prized the mysterious Presence of his adorable Redeemer, whenever he was inwardly drawn to hold sacred intercourse with Him.

Constantly did he incite those who sought his counsel to cultivate this hidden life with God. It was not a subject that he would speak upon to men generally, for there were only some fitted to receive it, and who could profit by it.

not indiscriminate, admiration for the characters and writings of many of the Mystics. And surely their ardent piety, their intense realisation of the Divine Presence, their spiritual-mindedness, their unselfishness, their humility, their calm and serene faith, the refinement, nay, the poetry of their style and matter, their elevated views of outward nature, their cultivation of the inner life—the “life hid with Christ in God”—and many other points in their system, are worthy of admiration.¹

¹ Overton, *Life and Opinions of the Rev. W. Law*, p. 200.

But a few were led to the practice of it not only by his instructions but by his example ; and glorified God for having given them such a Brother who so clearly witnessed to the truth of Christ's promised manifestation of Himself to His faithful servants.

This interior life was not, however, thus regarded by all who heard of it. Some looked upon it as the pursuit of an enthusiastic visionary, and presumptuous fanatic. Some scoffed at it, and also reproached him for arrogancy, in thinking that he could ever thus talk with the Divine Being, as a man would to his friend. Was he not a sinner like all other men, though he was a 'religious' ? Was it not almost blasphemous for him to think that the Great God would condescend to hold such intimate intercourse with him, who was but a frail human being like themselves, and so also for Thomas to attempt thus to converse with Him, as with a real person ? Thomas heard of these taunting remarks, and it grieved him sore ; he considered again with himself whether there was any ground for complaint, and whether he should alter his course, and lessen his exalted faith in prayer. None knew better than he did, none recognised more than he did, the Divine majesty of the God Whom he addressed. None felt more deeply than he did the sinfulness of his own heart ; he did not hide it from himself, or try to make it out that he was better than others, for he felt the plague of sin working still within him, and that he needed pardon as much as others. Yet this, he knew, should not keep him back from holding sweet and close communion with the blessed Saviour Who had invited him to come boldly to the throne of grace, and open his whole soul to Him as he would to his best and bosom friend. His own conscience acquitted him of acting presumptuously ; but as the matter troubled him, he must, like Hezekiah of old, take it and spread it before the Lord. And in the following devout colloquy we have the substance of what was said on this solemn and sacred occasion, how this matter was referred to Christ, and what he received in answer from Christ Himself. Beginning with the

words of Scripture, 'My God is my mercy, and therefore I am not confounded,'¹ he thus proceeds:—

Let it not seem absurd to any one, that I should desire frequently to hold converse with the Lord my God, Whose loving-kindness often attracts me, slothful though I am, and inflames the desire in me for prayer and meditation; since it would sound harsh and ungrateful to me, not to respond to His calls.

But perhaps some one may speak against me, Dost thou not then fear GOD, since thou art indeed an unclean sinner, and unworthy even of life itself? Whence arises in thee this presumption of heart?

And since thou art the least of all, and more to be despised than all, why dost thou still thrust thyself into Divine colloquies? Whom dost thou make thyself to be?

O Lord, my Beloved, answer for me, because the mouth of the wicked is open upon me. If I would justify myself, my own mouth will condemn me: and if I am clean, my soul knoweth not this very matter. Thou knowest my foolishness and my confusion; speak Thou, I will gladly hold my peace.

And *the voice of my Beloved* answered, 'Heed not the words of them that reproach thee, but listen rather to what I have said. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will? Who shall resist my will?

'If I choose to confer a benefit in some measure upon thee, although the least of My servants, who shall convince Me of sin?

'Let him who is without sin first cast a stone at thee. But if they also are sinners, why do they detract from grace? Thou didst not choose Me, but My mercy hath preceded thee.

'And dare any still murmur against thee, because thou hast approached unto Me? Truly his murmuring is not against thee, but openly against Me; because I receive sinners, and eat with them.

'And wherefore shouldst thou not claim to thyself My friendship, which I rejoice more to exhibit than withdraw?'

Then I replied, 'O Beloved Lord, do not impute it to them, but to me and to my sins. I do not deny anything for which they think ill of me. I confess, and acknowledge this, since it is much worse than what is known.'

He said, 'It is good for thee, because thou hast humbled thyself, for thus thou shalt ever win greater gain, and wilt more readily obtain My grace.

¹ Probably from Isaiah l. 7. Louth renders the passage: 'The Lord God is my Helper; therefore shall I not be confounded.'

‘Yet thou art not on this account to be despised, because thou art a sinner and defective ; nevertheless, by reason thereof thou oughtest deservedly to despise thyself, and never to forget in how great things thou hast failed.

‘But lest thou shouldst perish through too great anxiety, consider how often I make saints and friends of sinners ; choosing the humble, and leaving those who presume concerning themselves.

‘I have no need that thou shouldst give Me ought of what is thine : but only this do I ask, that thou love Me with a pure heart, and it sufficeth.’

To Whom again *I replied*, ‘Ah ! shame upon me, that there is nothing in me whereby Thy love can be incited towards me.’

Once more *He said*, ‘I esteem none of those things, which the world offers to appease Me ; I require none such : love by itself is sufficient ; only let it glow, and let it persevere in continuing with Me.

‘Still, however, whose are the things that can adorn a man ? Are they not all Mine, both those that shine in the body, and those in the soul as well ? But those that belong to the world, and which embellish the body, ought to concern thee but little.

‘Those, however, which relate to the beauty of virtue concern thee, and should be thy care, that thou mayest be pleasing before God in the light of the living.

‘Howbeit thou hast justly humbled and accused thyself, regarding what is without as well as within, before the presence of My Majesty, by truly confessing thine infirmities and shameful deeds, and most deeply lamenting over them.

‘Because thou art in no wise worthy to claim the grace of My familiarity,¹ even for an hour ; since I am a Mirror without spot, and thou a sinner and unclean from infancy.

‘Remember then thy frail condition, and My noble excellency : and so with humble reverence do thou come boldly unto Me. For I am He that blotteth out sins and iniquities ; Who justifieth the ungodly, pardoning all his sins for My Name’s sake.

‘Not only do I confer these benefits, but I am prepared to bestow upon thee still greater gifts of mercy. For I choose to shew mercy rather than wrath, and am willing to spare more than to punish.

‘But this seemeth too little for Me ; nor am I thus contented, unless after the first grace I presently add a second and a third ;

¹ ‘Familiaritatis mee.’

yea, I place no bounds to My compassion, neither can the number of My graces and benefits be told.

‘Finally, after the pardon of sins, after penitence and complete satisfaction, I for the most part restore the joy of My saving countenance, by infusing the more abundant grace of the Holy Spirit.

‘And though the sinner still tarry in the flesh, yet do I receive him into my intimate fellowship, so that for the evils committed by him he may feel no longer any confusion of face, but rather the operation of thanksgiving and the voice of praise, because old things have passed away, and all things have become new.

‘So compassionate and merciful am I, that I am always more ready to pardon than thou art to repent, more prompt to give than thou to ask.

‘Why fearest thou then? Why tremblest thou to approach the bosom of so much goodness? And why shouldest thou estrange thyself from My grace so freely offered to thee?

‘Even if thou knowest that I purposed to deny thee, yet thou oughtest not to desist from praying, nor let go the confidence of being heard, but upon this the more vehemently press on until thou receivest. For My mercies are infinite, and that which at one time may be denied may at another be graciously granted.

‘How knowest thou but that I may at length turn My face unto thee, and give thee the desire of thine heart? And what saith the Prophet concerning Me? “Draw near unto Him, and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed.”¹

‘I rather accuse the rareness than the frequency of Thy approach, and thy timid modesty more than a too great confidence of pardon. To trust in My goodness is an indication of true humility and great faith.

‘These things I say unto thee, that thou mayest not sin; and if thou hast sinned that thou despair not, but quickly rise again; for thou still hast hope, and an Advocate with the Father.

‘Wilt thou wait till thou art made worthy before thou drawest near? And when of thyself shall this be? If only the good and worthy, the great and perfect men ought to draw near to Me, to whom shall the sinners and publicans go?

‘What therefore says the Gospel? It saith, “Then drew near unto Jesus the publicans and sinners, for to hear Him.”² Let the unworthy then approach, that they may be made worthy. Let the wicked draw near, that they may be made good.

‘Let the little ones and those that are imperfect draw near,

¹ Ps. xxxiv. .

² St. Luke xv. 1.

that they may become great and perfect. Let all and every one draw near, that they may receive out of the fulness of the Living Fountain.

‘I am the Fountain of Life, that cannot be exhausted. Whosoever thirsts, let him come to Me and drink ; whosoever hath nothing, let him come and buy without price.

‘Whosoever is sick, let him come that he may be healed ; whosoever is lukewarm, let him come that he may be inflamed ; whosoever is fearful, let him come that he may be comforted.

‘Whosoever is sorrowful, let him come that he may be comforted ; whosoever is dry, let him come that he may be filled with the richness and fulness of the Spirit ; whosoever is wearied, let him come that he may be refreshed with joy.

‘Behold ! My delight is to be with the sons of men. Whosoever desireth wisdom, let him come to My teaching ; whosoever longeth for riches, let him come to receive those that are eternal and incorruptible.

‘Whosoever is ambitious of honours, let him come that he may inherit an eternal name in heaven ; whosoever longeth for happiness, let him come that he may possess it without fear and danger.

‘Whosoever yearns for an abundance of all good things, let him come to Me, that he may enjoy the chief, eternal, infinite Good. I am He that giveth all temporal goods, and more than temporal ; I bestow the Eternal in the heavenly kingdoms.

‘Nor will I fail in My promise, when the salutary observance of My commands have been fully kept. He shall be gloriously crowned in heaven who hath lawfully contended in this world.’¹

Such words as these, coming as it were from the Divine Saviour—the Beloved Bridegroom—must have been a great comfort and support to Thomas, and given him strength and resolution to persevere in this most sacred intercourse which he held with Jesus, notwithstanding the scoffs of those who derided him, and condemned the practice. Thomas acted in the full consciousness and unsophisticated belief that he was speaking to God his Saviour, and that the same glorious Friend graciously condescended and vouchsafed to answer him, and inform him inwardly of His holy will and how he should live. Like the prophet of old who stood upon his watch-tower, he waited upon God, keeping silence before Him, and, listening with a soul

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

opened to receive the messages of His grace, and the instructions of the Divine life, he hearkened to what the Lord God would say concerning him, and what he should answer when he was reproved.

And it is no little matter of thankfulness that à Kempis did not desist from thus holding such exalted intercourse with his Redeemer, but was encouraged to persevere, as it affords a beautiful example and encouragement to all thoroughly earnest Christians to rise to this inner and higher life with Christ. For let not those be kept back from this sweet and refreshing fellowship with Jesus, with the thought or idea that it is only imaginary, or for visionary enthusiasts; for if they have the witness in themselves that they are Christ's, if their lives give witness that they are faithful followers of their Lord and that they are being made conformable to His image, they are warranted by the promises of Christ to avail themselves of it, and should go forward in faith, feeling sure that in some way—however mystical and supernatural it may be—Christ will fulfil His word.¹

And then again, it is a matter of thankfulness that à Kempis persevered in thus maintaining a personal fellowship with Christ, because in the 'De Imitatione Christi' we have the mature fruit of his blessed intercourse very largely set forth. Thus in the third and largest book of that work, which has been generally received throughout Christendom as one of the most valuable treasuries of devotion, the greater part is composed of such like sacred colloquies afterwards held between Christ and this humble and faithful follower of Him. Very interesting is it to notice the several sublime and holy subjects relating to the Christian life which are brought forward: such as—How to live before God in truth and humility—The power of Divine Love—How to moderate and subdue the desires of the heart. There is, however, a long list of subjects to which I must refer the reader. In the fourth book also, relative to the Holy Sacrament, it will be found that there are many

¹ St. John xiv. 21, 23.

passages, and even whole chapters, of Christ speaking to the soul. And the matter in the second book likewise, treats mostly upon holding intimate converse and friendship with Jesus. So that the chief characteristic of this very work, which is said to be a book for making saints, is that which we have just called attention to in the spiritual history of à Kempis. And it is easy to see the peculiar kind of agreement there is between the books of the 'Imitation' and the history of the inner life of à Kempis ; how one is the sequel or outcome of the other ; and that from his holding these precious interlocutions with the gracious Saviour, we have these his choicest counsels of Divine wisdom.

Among the many points which seem to assure us that Thomas à Kempis is the author of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' this remarkable harmony between what he was wont to do, which he elsewhere largely speaks of, and what he wrote in this work is one of the most important and corroborative of evidences.

With a few passages from the second book on the subject, we will close the chapter.

Christ will come to you and reveal to you His consolation, provided that you prepare for Him. . . .

Many visits He makes to the inner man, and holds sweet colloquies with the soul, soothing it, filling it with peace, and admitting it to an exceeding familiarity with Himself.

O faithful soul ! prepare your heart for this Spouse, that He may deign to visit you and abide within you.¹

It is a piece of great skill to know how to hold converse with Jesus ; and it is great wisdom to know how to keep Jesus.

Be humble and peaceable, and Jesus will be with thee. Be devout and quiet, and Jesus will stay with thee. Thou mayest soon drive away Jesus and lose His favour, if thou turn aside to outward things. . . .

Be pure and free within, and entangle not thine heart with any creature. Thou oughtest to be naked as it were, and to carry a pure heart to God, if thou wouldest find rest and see how sweet the Lord is.²

¹ Chap. i. 1, 2.

² Chap. viii. 3, 5.

CHAPTER XXI.

Events, 1425-1433—Memorials of Brothers Conrad and Egbert Linghen—Investitures of Brethren—À Kempis's intercourse as Sub-prior with the Brethren—The quarrel about the election of Archbishop of Utrecht—The country laid under an Interdict—À Kempis and the Brothers driven forth from their monastery—A temporary refuge found in Friesland—With whom lay the blame of this persecution—Other accounts of Brothers who died—The death of John, the brother of Thomas à Kempis, and the first Prior of their monastery—The return of the Brothers of Common Life to Mount St. Agnes.

AFTER the election of Theodoric as the third Prior of their House at Mount St. Agnes, à Kempis records many sad circumstances that happened in the Diocese of Utrecht, to which they belonged, and in no small measure affected their own monastery and other religious bodies in the land. These arose in consequence of a schism in the Diocese which ensued upon the appointment of Sweder de Culenborgh to be Bishop in opposition to the noble Rodolph de Diepholt, who had been chosen by the majority. The dissensions and disunion continued a long time, and involved not only the clergy and religious bodies, but the leading citizens of the larger towns. A further account of this will be given shortly, for I must now take up the events as they are recorded in the Chronicles.

In the same year, says à Kempis, i.e. in which Theodoric was appointed Prior (1425), on the Festival of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, our Brother Conrad, the Tailor, one of the *Conversi*, died, just when 'compline' was ended. He was a native of Scyrebeke, and had lived under Father Florentius at Deventer. There he had been taught how to make clothes, and had eventually been sent to Mount St. Agnes, where he humbly and piously dwelt many years, sewing, washing, and repairing the clothes of the

Brethren. At the close of his life he was particularly glad that he had had this duty assigned to him, of so often washing the garments of the Brethren, hoping by this operation that 'he might,' as he expressed it, 'wash away the filth of their sins.' By this he probably meant merely, that whilst performing this humble service he had prayed for them individually, that as he by the labour of washing cleansed the outward garments of such an one, so God would, for Christ's sake, cleanse the soul of that Brother from the pollution of sin. À Kempis tells us that he was a modest and virtuous man, a lover of poverty and simplicity. He ardently desired to depart and to be with Christ and Mary, whom he often named at his latter end; and this was soon vouchsafed unto him, and he died quietly and devoutly. His body was buried in the cemetery near the north door, towards the east wall of the House.

I may observe in passing, that in these short and simple sketches of the Brethren we see how, not only the individual traits of their characters and the nature of their occupations are severally set forth, but how other minute particulars are named, especially as to where their bodies were buried. Thus the Chronicle was made to serve as a Register of the monastery for such matters. And the usefulness of it was particularly to be seen afterwards when thus continued upon the death of à Kempis, for, owing to the record of this event in the Chronicle, the place where his body was laid was traced out some two hundred years afterwards.

The first approach of the storm alluded to above, which threatened the Brotherhood on Mount St. Agnes, made itself visible before the close of the same year. Sweder de Culenborgh, contrary to the majority of those who had the right of election, was confirmed as Bishop of Utrecht by the authority of the Papal See. And while he was received by the citizens of Utrecht and some other towns, he was not accepted as Bishop by the towns of Overysse, especially those of Zwolle, Campen, and Deventer. On this account these cities were placed

under an interdict, and a great controversy arose among the clergy and people ; as some were for observing the interdict, while others, who were greatly in majority, were opposed to paying any heed to it. 'Alas ! Holy God !' exclaims Thomas à Kempis, 'on St. Lambert's Day it was enjoined upon us that we must suspend our singing on account of the Interdict. Therefore, upon our observing the Interdict, the nobles of the land and a great number of people were enraged against us and other religious Houses: we endured much opprobrium and were at length compelled to leave our monastery and the country on account of our obeying the Interdict.' This latter calamity was, however, for a while deferred ; the clouds seemed to gather overhead and threatened them for some time ere the storm burst upon them. In the meantime other things were taking place.

In the remainder of the twentieth chapter of the *Chronicles*, Thomas à Kempis records the Investment of two Brothers with the Order of Canon Regular on Christmas Day, viz. James Cluit of Campen, who for some time had studied under the famous Rector of Deventer, John de Juliac ; and Gerard Smullinc, who had been under the worthy Rector of the Schools at Zwolle, John Cele. Thomas names also the admission of a lay brother from Utrecht, one James, a brother of William Vorniken, who had but lately been their Prior.

'In the year 1427, on the day of St. Ægidius, Abbot, there died after the third hour of the night at Dieppenheim, in the monastery of the Sisters of our Order, Brother Egbert de Linghen, Rector and Confessor of the same convent, and was there interred in the church beyond the choir, between the two chancels, by the Prior of Windesheim, who was present. He was a native of Ummen, but his parents had afterwards removed to Zwolle, and being a youth of good abilities he began to frequent the schools under John Cele, and made great proficiency. When, moreover, he heard of the laudable fame of John de Ummen at Mount St. Agnes, he purposely went to him, and being

piously impressed by his salutary counsel, he left his parents when sufficiently advanced in learning, and humbly and piously associated himself with the poor Brethren of Christ. After some time he was advanced to the office of priest in the same House, and making great progress in the grace of devotion, he, in a little time, received the habit of the Order with the three first Brethren. He was also for some time Sub-prior of our House at Mount St. Agnes—a man of noble soul, eloquent in speech, careful in writing, a consoler of the sorrowful, quickly forgiving injuries, and heartily rejoicing in the advancement of others. He beautifully illuminated many of the singing books in the choir, and many codices for our repository or library, and some books he wrote for sale. Very greatly did he love our House on Mount St. Agnes, even more than any other place in the world: and he laboured diligently and faithfully for its foundation. At length on the death of his parents, as he was their only son, he became the legitimate heir of all their worldly possessions, and these he made over for the use of the Brothers of Common Life at Mount St. Agnes, who as yet were dwelling in great poverty. On account of these benefactions both he and his parents were every year deservedly held in remembrance at the monastery.’

It must be remembered that during this period à Kempis held a very important post in this little Christian community. Though not the Prior or head of the monastery, he was next in authority, and under him was especially charged with looking after the spiritual welfare of the body, particularly the younger members. And though of a studious turn of mind, a lover of solitude, and given to much prayer and devout meditation, he was not one to neglect or perform perfunctorily the duties laid upon him. On the contrary, there is sufficient evidence to prove that he not only actively engaged himself in discharging every requirement of his office, but endeavoured in every possible way to influence for good, for the attaining of a higher Christian life, by strenuous efforts, those

who came under his direction, or willingly sought his godly counsel. We have in his 'Epitaphium Breve, seu Enchiridion Monachorum' what appears to be the substance of his private intercourse with some of the younger members of the Brotherhood during this period : and from this work of his I shall here therefore give a few extracts as an example of his instructions at this time, and such as it may be desirable to introduce.

The first subject of discourse is concerning 'The Strait Way of the Just to the Kingdom of Heaven,' and is as follows :—

The Way of the Just is made strait, and the journey of the Saints is prepared.

After what manner ?

By sorrow and labour ; for this is the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Is there no other way to the Life Eternal ?

None. The only strait way is that of the Cross.

It is so. Christ has taught this in His Word, and by His example He has marked it out to be followed by all. All the Saints have walked in this way, even unto death, according to that saying of the Lord, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate, which leadeth unto Life.'

O Monk ! what doest thou *in thy cell* ?

'I read, I write, I gather honey. These are the solace of my soul.'

Thou hast well said, for the cell of the monk is the place where he should fervently engage in the labour and study of books.

O Cleric ! what dost thou do *in the Choir* ?

'I read, I sing praises, I bitterly deplore my sins.'

Thou hast answered rightly : for the Choir is the place where, in the Clerics ought to be occupied in singing of Psalms with joyfulness, and in praising God with heart and voice, as the Angels do in Heaven.

O Religious one ! what dost thou eat *at the table* ?

'The bitter sorrows of Christ. I ponder upon His wounds, I condole, I number them, I bewail them one by one.'

Nothing couldst thou more justly and excellently ponder over. For the table of the Poor should turn our thoughts to the sorrows and suffering of Christ, and to returning thanks to God.

O Devout one ! what drinkest thou *at supper* ?

‘ Good Lessons, full of nectar.’

Thou hast answered rightly ; for the supper of the Devout ought to be accompanied with sacred reading and relishing the sense of the words. Is not the soul of more value than the body ?

If a good draught is refreshing in the mouth, how much more refreshing a good understanding of the Scriptures in the heart.

Thus very simply and yet pointedly does à Kempis keep before them their chief aim in life, reminding them of their holy calling by the way in which he addresses them. Here is another short discourse, ‘ On the Custody of the Heart and Mouth.’ Taking the words of the Psalmist, ‘ I said I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not in my tongue,’ he continues :—

Never be thou idle, nor talkative, nor curious, nor given to laughter. Before labour, and in labour, be mindful of the Lord thy God, that He may preserve thee.

Thou art always in the midst of adversaries, and art tossed to and fro amidst the perils of a stormy sea ; thou must therefore pray without ceasing that thou mayst not be overcome with vices and drowned in the gulf of evil by despair.

Stand firmly, and do not flinch in thy daily contest, and especially beware of three beasts. In the morning contend against sloth ; at noon against gluttony ; in the evening against carnal lust.

The dog will sleep long ; the wolf will eat a great deal ; and the ass will be wanton in lying down. Rouse up the dog with a whip ; beat the wolf with a staff ; and scourge the ass with prickly thorns. The whip is the fear of death ; the staff is the fire of hell ; and the thorns the Passion of Christ, and the sufferings of saintly martyrs.

With these three weapons the vices of the flesh are to be overcome.

Next we have a few sentences ‘ On frequently Invoking the Name of Jesus.’

Be mindful to invoke God in every work ; also morning, noon, and evening, with holy Daniel ; and so wilt thou be assisted in every necessity of the body and soul.

Have Jesus in thy heart, and thou wilt be preserved from all defilement.

Solitude and silence, prayer and fasting, are the arms of monks.

To labour in the day, to watch and pray at night, is the special exercise of the Saints.

This is acceptable to God and to the angels ; it is against the devils, profitable to the young, delightful to the aged, hard to the slothful, but light and sweet to the devout.

If thou art tired with prayer, endeavour to ponder a little on the Psalms ; and thus the Holy Ghost, the best Comforter, the inmost Teacher, the greatest Enlightener of the heart, will strengthen thee.

Another talk with one or more of the Brotherhood is ‘ On the Daily Contest against Vice ; ’ from the text, ‘ The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.’

Put on therefore the arms of the Holy Cross ; fight as a brave soldier, study as a good cleric, pray as a devout monk, labour as a faithful servant of God, and thou wilt be gloriously crowned in Heaven.

As one nail is driven out with another, so is vice expelled by virtue, wrath is restrained by silence, gluttony subdued by fasting, sloth put to flight by labour, idle laughter stopped by holy sorrow. Hatred is slain by love, an enemy is appeased by kindness.

Peace of heart is acquired by patience ; and he who accuses others lightly, quickly falleth into indignation. Also to be but little entangled in business leads to the acquisition of peace.

Often it is said, and often should it be repeated, that it may be well borne in mind, that nothing is easier than to say you will do anything, but nothing more blessed than the doing of it, according to Christ’s own words, ‘ If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.’

Many are full of words, few can keep silence : many are full of desires, few that are contented with a little. But no one is fully satisfied unless he enjoys the supreme good.

Every table is poor where bread and salt is wanting ; and that meal is insipid where sacred reading is wanting, and where vain words abound. The best dish for the soul is to hear the Word of God, and to digest it well.

He is fed with delicious food who is delighted with sacred words ; but he who willingly hears and seeks after vain discourse shall long remain dry and indeavour.

À Kempis held the Lord's Prayer in high esteem. He had been saying, 'Among the books of devotion nothing was more edifying than the *Life of Christ*. Among the prayers and praises of God nothing was more sacred than the *Lord's Prayer*;' when he takes occasion to speak of the latter after this manner:—

The Lord's Prayer excels all the petitions and aspirations of the Saints : for all the sayings of the Prophets, and all the melliferous words of the Psalms and Canticles, are contained in it after a most full but yet secret manner. It asks for all necessary things, it praises God most highly, it knits the soul to God, and lifts her up from earth to heaven, it penetrates the clouds, and ascends far above the Angels. Blessed is he who attentively ponders upon every word of Christ.

Here are some sayings of à Kempis, taken from the same source, well worthy of being reproduced:—

He that is proud of any good, is neither grateful nor faithful to God.

Be not exalted with pride, lest thou lose the gift which thou didst receive from heaven without any merit of thine own.

Take care of thy good name, but do not feign thyself better, nor believe thyself holier, than others.

A good life makes a good name : and he who governs himself ill will lose his good name.

Better is good fame from holiness of life, than the sweet odour of precious ointment, or than much riches.

The distraction of the heart soon comes from things heard and seen : but frequent prayer and internal compunction expel all noxious imaginations and superfluous cares.

Shun being extolled for any good before men, for thou hast many faults within which God discerns, but which thou seest not nor considerest as thou oughtest.

He who seeks after the praise of men for some singular deed, doth often by the wise permission of God incur confusion before a multitude openly.

Wash thy hands from perverse work, and refrain thy lips from idle speech, thine eyes from shameful sights, and thine heart from evil thinking, and thou shalt be clean before God.

You often wash your hands and face that you should not be displeasing to men ; how much more should you wash your con-

science from vice that you may be pleasing to God and to His angels, who behold the hidden secrets of the heart.

Such words as these, being intermingled in the conversation of à Kempis with the Brethren, exercised a salutary influence upon their minds, and kept alive in their souls a deep sense of the reality of Divine things. His work was a congenial one, and his sphere of duty among kindred spirits, who responded to his elevating sentiments and higher tone of Christian teaching, was inciting to him, and called forth his best powers. The days and hours passed quietly and happily along, and many sweet and peaceful moments did he enjoy in this retired house of religion. And yet the even tenor of his ways was from time to time broken in upon and somewhat disturbed by the many changes and chances of this mortal life. The constant round of duties pertaining to his office, the oft-recurring exercises of devotion, the calm solitude of his cell, and the holy quietude of soul which he possessed, were not entirely free from the various incidents and trials to which other men are subject. Hitherto à Kempis and his Brethren had been sheltered from any violent encounter with the world, and had lived in comparative peace. But matters were not to go on as they had done; darker days were at hand, a crisis was gradually approaching, and this peaceful Christain household where à Kempis dwelt, and in which he was a chief leading spirit, would shortly have to encounter the rough opposition of men from without. Great uneasiness prevailed among the Brethren, for threats had been for some time made which caused them to fear that ere long they would be driven forth from their monastery, and have to become wanderers upon the face of the earth, without a home. And this presented a terrible prospect to those who had given up active intercourse with the world, and had lived quietly in cheerful godliness; it meant that they should be buffeted by those who loved them not, and would have to endure much unpleasantness and ill-usage from without. Indeed, they knew not what would befall them.

Already the voice of joy and gladness in the sacred services of the Church had ceased by reason of the Interdict ; and the people in the neighbouring towns of Zwolle and Campen were wrathfully displeased with them for yielding to it. The Brethren in the various monasteries of Overijssel had been warned and threatened again and again, that unless the ordinances of the Church were administered as aforetime they should not be allowed to retain quiet possession of their places. And at last the storm burst upon them. Buschius, in his 'Chronicles of Windesheim,' speaking of what they had to endure for their obedience to Papal authority, says, 'During the time that William Vorniken was Prior at Windesheim our monastery, and many others of our Order, and all the devout men and women of the pious congregations in the towns and villages of Overijssel, faithfully serving God, were called upon to suffer many and grievous adversities and the loss of temporal goods, while some of the Sisters were shut up in their Houses. At length many of the Brethren and Sisters were driven from their monasteries and other dwellings, and sent into exile on account of their resolute obedience to the Apostolic See. For rather than act contrary to their consciences they would go forth from their country, bearing their trials with a resolute mind.'¹

For the better understanding of what happened it will be necessary to go back a little in the history of events to explain the cause of this diocesan schism, and the consequent bitter calamities and persecution that overtook the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes and elsewhere, not long after the death of Frederic de Blanckenheim, fifty-first bishop of Utrecht, under whose rule they had long peaceably lived.

It will interest many of our readers to know that the Church of Utrecht may in truth be called a daughter of the Church of England, since it owns St. Willibrod for its apostle. According to Baronius, about the close of the seventh century, this English priest, being encouraged by

¹ *Chron. Windes.*, chap. xxxiv. p. 139.

Pepin, mayor of the palace of France, made some progress in the conversion of the West Frieslanders : and afterwards taking a journey to Rome, was made Archbishop of that country by Pope Sergius ; and by the favour of Pepin had his see fixed at Utrecht, where he built his cathedral. He likewise built a great many churches and monasteries in that country, erected several episcopal sees, and furnished them with prelates out of his own retinue of missionaries that went along with him.¹

Though Utrecht afterwards became a suffragan see to that of Cologne, it was at first and during the lifetime of Thomas à Kempis independent, and enjoyed in fact a dignity and pre-eminence almost more than metropolitical. The Bishop numbered under his spiritual rule no less than seventeen provinces, if we except some distant portions which were attached to other bishoprics. Fourteen new sees and three archbishoprics were afterwards formed out of this single Diocese of Utrecht, since it was found utterly impossible otherwise to provide efficiently and adequately for the pastoral superintendence of the churches. We must take into account also the further complications of those conflicting political influences which made the Low Countries the debatable land of Europe, and which gave such vast importance to many of the sees. The Prince Bishops of Liège, Utrecht, and Munster fought and conquered, like any other temporal sovereigns.

The distance of the See of Utrecht from the city of the Three Kings, its immense wealth, its temporal dominion, all conduced to give it a position of commanding influence. The particular province of Utrecht belonged in full sovereignty to the Bishop ; whether so given by Charlemagne, or at a later period, is a point in dispute and it is not here essential to determine. What is more material is, that the Chapter of Utrecht enjoyed a free and uncontrolled right of choosing their own bishops from the earliest times, and maintained it to the latest. The constitution of this Chapter was somewhat peculiar. It contained five subor-

¹ Collier's *Eccl. Hist.*, vol. i. book ii. p. 271.

dinate Chapters, that of the magnificent cathedral, and those of the four collegiate churches of St. Saviour, St. Peter, St. Mary, and St. Martin.¹ Nor is it wonderful that these ecclesiastics should have retained their right to a free election, when concordats and sanctions of all kinds were making other bishops the nominees of the Pope, or of the sovereign. The strength and possessions of the Church of Utrecht, amid the growing greed for power, stood her at least in good stead. The lords of the Low Countries dared not risk the loss of influence in that province by attempting to turn that influence into a supremacy. The Papal Court often cast a covetous eye upon the See of Utrecht, and were wont to intrigue for gaining the main say in the election of its Bishop. The struggle for ascendancy continued through the whole of the fifteenth century; till at length, in the year 1528, Henry of Bavaria, having been four years Bishop, but not yet consecrated, the chapters, setting a nobler example than might have been expected from the age, ceded their temporal sovereignty to the Emperor Charles V., saving all the other rights of the Church, and among them that of the free election of their Bishops. The great importance of this step is to be seen in giving to the See of Utrecht a position unique among the Churches of the Continent, which renders it still independent of the Church of Rome.²

To return, however, to the struggle which took place in the days of Thomas à Kempis. When Bishop Frederic de Blanckenheim died, three candidates for the Bishopric of Utrecht were put forward—Rodolph de Diepholt, Sweder de Culenborgh, Dean of the Cathedral, and Walraff de Morsan. As the canons were in deliberation, a burgo-

¹ The *Windesheim Chronicle*, vol. i. chap. xxxiv., gives St. Martin, whereas a later historian gives St. John instead.

² See the latter chapters of Neale's *Jansenist Church of Holland*, wherein it will be seen that the Pope excommunicates the Archbishops of Utrecht on their being consecrated, because they will not yield obedience to him. There is the account of an important discussion also between the papal Nuncio, who came into Holland in 1827 to settle ecclesiastical affairs with the Archbishop, and the indignant refusal of the latter, after a long controversy, to sign a formulary required by the Pope.

master of Utrecht broke into the conclave, and threatened his nephew, the Dean of St. Peter's, with death, if he gave his vote for any but Rodolph. On this the Cathedral Chapter protested, that any election made under a threat would be invalid, and retired. The other Chapters continued their deliberations. Sweder, finding himself without any chance, gave his votes to Rodolph, who was thus elected by the four Chapters; the Cathedral Chapter elected Walraff. Rodolph, however, who was yet a layman, having the immense majority of suffrages, was enthroned, and took possession; and then requested his bulls from Martin V. This demand was supported by the city, and by the Duke of Cleves. Martin, at the end of two years, declared the election null, under the plea that Rodolph was said to be illiterate and almost an idiot.

Surely his countrymen thought better of him, or they would not have upheld his election, and the Pope's successor must have become better enlightened on this point, or he would not ultimately have consented to Rodolph being received as the Bishop. But this little papal artifice was to serve a purpose, and Martin in the plenitude of his power nominated Raban, Bishop of Spire, to the see. This prelate took the precaution of inquiring whether he should have any chance of entering his cathedral without bloodshed. On learning that his episcopate must undoubtedly be purchased by a battle, he sold all his right to Sweder, the disappointed candidate, in return for Sweder's deanery, 'and other things.' It was two years before this arrangement was ratified by the Pope, and Sweder, having obtained his bulls, marched upon Utrecht.

With very great difficulty, and after having been tied up by the most solemn oaths, he was enthroned; while Rodolph, for his part, fled to Brussels, maintained his rights and appealed to the Pope better informed. Oaths, however, were nothing to Sweder. Bernard Proeys, the burgomaster who had distinguished himself for his zeal on behalf of Rodolph, was found murdered in his bed. Arrests, imprisonments, executions, followed in quick

succession, till the three estates of Utrecht forbade any one to obey—that is, as a temporal lord—the so-called Bishop. The citizens of Overijssel, as Deventer, Zwolle, and Campen, with the soldiers and people, resolutely refused to receive Sweder, since they still adhered to Rodolph, who had been duly elected. Then it was that Pope Martin first, and then Pope Eugenius IV., issued a mandate of excommunication against Rodolph with all his supporters and whoever favoured his cause; and further proceeded to place the whole country under a most strict interdict.

In the meantime, the partisans of Rodolph obtained possession of the castle at Utrecht, and Sweder was driven from the city. Rodolph was recalled, and, under the title of Bishop-postulate, took charge of the Church. The *Postulaets gulden*, which he struck, are esteemed by the *virtuosi* as among the rarest of Dutch coins. Sweder assembled the few ecclesiastics that adhered to him at Arnheim, and laid the whole diocese under the interdict. After this he departed to the Council of Basle. Then all the citizens in the towns and fortified places, and all the people of the country and not a few of the clergy interposed, and appealed to the Pope to remove the interdict. As Martin V., however, looked down on the whole proceeding with a lofty unconcern, they next appealed to a future Pope, or to a future council, and disobeyed the interdict, which was only observed, as the Chronicler of Windesheim says, by the ‘religious’ and those fearing God. And, continues the same historian, the various classes of the community having endured the interdict a long time became greatly exasperated, and compelled the monasteries of Utrecht either to accept Rodolph and adhere to their country, or to go forth from their monasteries and fatherland; because they were by no means willing to retain them in the country among the rest of the people, unless they consented to recommence singing in the churches and publicly celebrating the Divine Mysteries as aforetime.

Notices to this effect having been severally served upon them, the Prior of Windesheim held a consultation with the

Priors of the same Order in Zwolle and Mount St. Agnes ; and they determined among themselves, with the consent of their several convents, that, rather than irritate the people of the land against them, they would take their departure and joyfully suffer the penalty, than consent to obey the injunction against the Apostolic See, to the scandal of all the devout priests, clerics of the divers congregations, and of certain canons and vicars, who already to a large extent had left their homes and country. Nevertheless certain of the secular clergy and canons, having violated the interdict, celebrated the Divine Mysteries before the excommunicated in their several towns and villages, ministering the Sacraments of the Church to the people.

Then certain canons of Utrecht, with the deputies, sheriffs, and other authorities of the aforesaid towns, went from one monastery to another, and laid the edict of their fellow-countrymen before the Brethren assembled in their several choirs, and demanded that they should either at once begin the singing and resume the Divine offices before them, or depart from their monasteries and country. Then one and all, the Brethren, the *Conversi* and other lay Brothers of the convents, chose rather to go forth into the world as strangers, than profane their consciences for the sake of endeavouring to preserve their temporal goods. It was a mournful and pitiful sight. When they were pressed to go, some of the Brethren left of their own free will ; others were respectfully conducted forth ; while a few were turned out of the choir and church by force ; and were all led forth beyond the diocese of Utrecht ; a few infirm Brethren alone being permitted to stay behind in each House, while certain laymen were appointed for the guardianship of the said monasteries.

The Prior of Windesheim with his Brethren went to the monastery of the same Order in fellowship with them at Benthem, near Northorn, because the Prior, an intimate friend and offspring of the convent of Windesheim, was, as Buschius says, truly in charity with us. The Prior of Zwolle with his convent went to the southern provinces of

Germany. The Prior and convent of Mount St. Agnes went by ship to Friesland, to a monastery of their Order at Lunenkerk. And here I take up the story to a large extent as told by à Kempis, since the account he gives more particularly concerns himself and his Brethren.

In 1429, when nine lords of Gelderland made a grievous complaint against the Regulars for their obedience to the Apostolic letters and to the interdict of Sweder, Bishop of Utrecht, and because they were unwilling to adhere to the cause or the partisans of Rodolph, the Canons Regular of the Common Life fraternity were compelled either to resume the singing in the churches or to take their departure altogether from the country When this hard announcement was placed before our Fathers and Brethren, it was the unanimous determination of all to preserve Apostolic obedience, and prepare to wander forth, leaving the Houses of the convent in the hands of some of the lay-members of the household. And this expulsion was effected on the feast of St. Barnabas, before the setting of the sun.

It was a sad and mournful sight to watch the Brethren in this trying hour of misfortune. They had met together once more in the chapel of the monastery, and had engaged in a final service, in which they commended themselves to God's protecting care. They hastily gathered together some of their manuscript books and a few necessary things to take with them ; and, bidding a tender farewell to a few sympathising neighbours who had assembled to see them take their departure, they, with one more look at their beloved home, resolutely turned their faces and began their exodus. Winding their way down the sides of the Mount in the direction of Zwolle, the procession of saintly Brethren, among whom the figure of Thomas à Kempis, still Sub-prior, was seen with no ordinary regard, moved on their journey. Whether the Brethren went through the town of Zwolle is not mentioned. Probably they might wish to avoid encountering both the opprobrium of those who were opposed to them, as well as the warm greetings of firm

friends, for great excitement prevailed respecting their expulsion, and they would wish to leave the country as quietly as possible without raising any ill feeling by passing through the town. And if so, then they would probably make a detour to the north, about a mile before coming to Zwolle, and crossing the river Vetch, they would shortly again strike into the main road which led them to their first night's resting-place, which most likely they would reach before it was quite dark, for the days were then nearly at their longest ; and the sweet summer evening, closing with its soft twilight and cool air, would somewhat refresh and calm their weary and troubled souls.

It was a day that brought other memories for Thomas à Kempis, for twenty-three years before, on the vigil of this day, he had made his profession ; and it was, therefore, a season much to be remembered by him. And as they moved on their way he would not fail to call to mind the vows he had then made ; and pondering over his past life since then, as they silently went along on their compulsory pilgrimage, he would doubtless muse over the singular providence of God, which had led to this event, and wonder what might yet befall them, or whether they should ever be permitted to return again to their sweet retreat on Mount St. Agnes ; and, if they should, who among them would be left to witness it. Twenty-nine years of an earnest devout life had been spent by him in the place they were leaving behind them, in sweet communion with God, in loving companionship with the Brethren around him, in constant employment of one kind or another, which more or less tended to the glory of God and the edification of his neighbours. They had been mostly happy days, and especially of late years, until the clouds gathered over their heads, and now God had called him, like Abraham, to go forth with his Brethren into a strange land, not knowing whither he went ; but, like the Patriarch of old, he would still trust firmly in God, and believe that He would make all things work together for their good, even this sad calamity that had overtaken them.

The Brethren of Mount St. Agnes remained the first night at Hasselt ; and the next day they sailed to Friesland, and went to their Brethren in Lunenkerck : and here they stopped, for needful accommodation was speedily provided for them ; and in the retreat and consolation of this House they began as it were a reformation, for, by the help of God drawing them, many of the Brethren there during this sojourn were brought into a good condition. About twenty-four Brethren, cleric and lay Brothers, were brought over in the ship at that time.

After stating that they had observed the interdict for upwards of a year, à Kempis gives the names of the Brethren who were driven forth. They are evidently put down in the order in which they ranked in the monastery.

In the first place there was our venerable Prior, Brother Theodoric Clive. Secondly, Brother Thomas à Kempis, Sub-prior. The third, was Brother John Ummen, old and infirm. The fourth, Brother Gerard Wesep. The fifth, Brother John Benevolt. The sixth, Brother Wormbold Stalwic. The seventh, Brother John Bowman. The eighth, Brother Henry Cremer. The ninth, Brother Henry of Deventer. The tenth, Brother Derick Veneman. The eleventh, Brother Helmick. The twelfth, Brother Christianus. The thirteenth, Brother James Cluyt. The fourteenth, Brother Gerard Smullinc. The fifteenth, Brother Caesar, a novice. The sixteenth, Brother Gossuin, the baker, a novice. Also two *Conversi* : Brother Arnold Droem, and Brother James de A (*sic*). Also three clerics, not yet invested with the habit of the Order : Hermann Craen, Gossuin ten Velde, Arnold ten Brincke. Also two *Donati* : Gerard Hombolt, and Laurentius. Also John Koyte, a guest and intimate friend of our House.

It will be observed that in making up the number twenty-four he distinguishes the residents in the monastery under three or four designations or titles. There are first the Brethren properly so called ; then the *Conversi* ; then the clerics not yet invested, and therefore not properly termed Brothers ; and, fourthly, we have the *Donati*.

Thomas à Kempis then proceeds to say how it fared with them.

All these were hospitably received that first night by the Sisters in Hasselt, who exhibited the great charity of humanity towards us. And because we had been forcibly expelled they grieved and wept for us very much. And when beds and suitable resting-places could not be found for all the Brethren, the Sisters, compassionating our condition, gave up their own couches, and prepared places with hay and straw for sleeping upon in the stable, that we might rest comfortably together. Many of the citizens also in Hasselt feeling deeply our condition shed many tears. But some of the citizens begrudged us any assistance, and, thinking evil of us, derided the Brethren and spoke ill of them. Many of these, however, were afterwards sorry for their behaviour towards us. The next morning at the break of day, having taken our food for the voyage with us, we were conducted to a little vessel in the harbour, and proceeded by way of the sea, rowing and sailing, not without great danger—for the wind was contrary to us; being desirous of getting to Friesland for the name of Christ, and for our obedience to the holy Roman Church. And having committed ourselves to God's care, He, exercising His compassion towards us, both delivered us from the perils of the sea, and brought us in safety to our Brethren at Lunenkerk.

Thomas à Kempis being Sub-prior, and being highly esteemed for his godly counsel, must have taken a prominent part in supporting and encouraging the Brethren to bear up under their unwonted trials. It was a new and bitter experience of life to him and them; but it was not without its good. This passing under the rod was sanctified to their spiritual profit, and refined their characters. The ways and words of God were to be interpreted in a new light; and fresh insight into their meaning was vouchsafed unto them. How forcibly would they feel themselves to be like strangers and pilgrims upon the earth! How often would they remember that troubled sea over which

they had passed ; and, when afterwards sweetly singing the Psalms in church, how vividly would they enter into the feelings of the sacred penman when he said : ‘ They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters ; these men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For at his word the stormy wind ariseth ; which lifteth up the waves thereof. They are carried up to the heaven and down again to the deep ; their soul melteth away because of the trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end. So when they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, he delivered them out of their distress. For he maketh the storm to cease, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they are at rest ; and so he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.’ And then how heartily and feelingly would they join in the chorus that follows : ‘ O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness ; and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men.’¹ And so also, how fully would they enter into the meaning of the Prophet’s words, who said : ‘ The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.’²

A few words more should here be said as to the question, Upon whom rests the blame of this persecution to which these peaceable, quiet, earnest, God-fearing men were subjected ? Some persons may say, It was their own fault. If they had fallen in with the reasonable wishes and just requirements of their countrymen, they would not have had to endure this banishment ; and that they were not justified in withholding the due ministrations of religion from the people under the circumstances. Or, again, that this was a case in which they ought not to have yielded to the behests of their ecclesiastical superiors, but that they should have considered with themselves what was the right thing to do for the spiritual welfare of others, and have acted accordingly. Now this reasoning may be all very well until you look at the other side of the question, and ask, what

¹ Ps. cvii. 23–31, Prayer-book version.

² Isai. lviii. 20.

would become of all rule, if everyone—if every congregation or body of men were to become a rule to themselves, and set up their judgment in opposition to those in authority whenever there was a plausible reason for it? Why, there would be an end of all rule, of all peaceable subordination. Granted that exceptions may properly arise, where it may be right to act contrary to the injunctions of the ruling power, let them be exceptions, and not the general rule. Look at the case of à Kempis and his Brethren. They were in a strait. There were two powers over them, both lawful, the one civil, the other ecclesiastical. The one bid them to do that which the other forbid them to do. The only course for them to take was to suffer; and they took it. Who shall lay anything to their charge? They felt the force of the Scriptural precept, and simply desired to follow it without entering into the dispute and contention, ‘Obey them that have the rule over you.’ And as they had sworn obedience to their ecclesiastical superiors on their severally entering their Order, they felt that they must yield obedience, however much they wished to fall in with the commendable wishes of the people. They chose, therefore, to set an example of dutiful submission to their spiritual superiors. And as a general rule they were right; but in doing this they incurred the displeasure of the civil power, and the only way left to them, was to take the alternative, and quit their much loved and sacred home, and become wanderers on the earth until the dispute was settled.

Then it will be asked, Should not the civil rulers and the churchmen of the diocese of Utrecht have forbore to push things to this extreme, and have submitted to ecclesiastical authority? If they had shown befitting subjection to higher authority, after having pleaded for their ancient liberty, rather than take the law into their own hands and driven these peaceful citizens out of the land, all might have been well again. They would indeed have had to give up their own way and will, and what they considered their right in this matter, but have we not all to

give up something for the sake of peace? and, because they would not, are they not justly to be blamed for persecuting Thomas à Kempis and his Brethren?

But here comes the hinge of the whole question. The matter of contention was of great importance, and great issues were at stake, which they felt bound to contend for. The civil power in a country have liberties, which the ecclesiastical authority have no just right, morally or religiously, to interfere with, to defraud them of, or to set aside. But, it may be replied, the appointment of a Bishop is surely an ecclesiastical right, and therefore the spiritual powers were justified in interfering. The proper answer to this is : Not altogether ; the right of the election of a Bishop in this case belonged to the country, exercised through the five chapters of Utrecht, and in this light the civil power stood forth to defend and uphold the right. If it had been exercised wrongly, or to the detriment of the Church at large, then, since the authority of the Pope had been allowed at that time as a corrective power, he might have interfered, but not to wrest the right out of their hands, and to sanction a worse appointment. This was really the aggression of a foreign potentate usurping a domination which did not belong to him ; and now, if ever, was the time to make a stand against this inroad upon the liberty of their country. And though they still desired to live in charity and peace with all men, and in subjection to spiritual authority when fairly exercised, the churchmen of Utrecht diocese felt that to thrust upon them such a Bishop as the Pope chose to appoint was an illegal encroachment, and to be resisted, if they were to retain their undoubted rights.

If then we are to take a fair and unbiased survey of the whole question, it must be admitted that they were acting rightly in the step they took, that they showed a proper and manly courage in asserting their independence, in that they would not submit to be trodden underfoot, and have this wrong inflicted upon them, though they had the whole force of the Papal Court against them. If the Pope claimed

to be the head of the Church, he was the more bound in conscience to do what was just and right in such matters, before all men ; and not by evil stratagems to seek after a domination that did not belong to him ; or to deprive them of the sacred ordinances of religion in order to coerce them to yield obedience to his arbitrary judgments. The Bishop to whom they were called by him to give allegiance, and whom the Pope upheld against the one they had chosen, had not had the support or voice of one of the five Chapters, who were the lawful electors ; for even the Cathedral Chapter, who differed from the other four, had not elected him who was nominated by the Pope, but Walraff ; and when the latter was set aside, none but Rodolph had a just claim to the bishopric. And yet the Pope insisted upon their receiving a man as their Bishop, who had not received the suffrage of any one of the Chapters, but who had bought the episcopate of Utrecht from another who had been appointed by the Pope. Could anything be more arbitrary and objectionable ?

But to take a still wider view of this important matter, which more or less affects the whole Catholic Church, and to go back to the original authority of the Popes or Bishops of Rome : it is well known to the students of ecclesiastical history that the original jurisdiction of the Bishops of Rome, before they claimed to be Popes, extended over but a portion of Italy ; and that in the early ages of the Church they were forbidden to interfere in the government or jurisdiction belonging to any of the other patriarchs. And though from holding a leading position in the Church they were often consulted, and their judgment esteemed of weight, and future councils of the Church gave them more power, yet still the assumed authority of Popes, as at present claimed, has been frequently gained by strange and often evil means, and in violation of the ancient Catholic rule and bonds of unity.

It is a frightful history ; but by whatever means it has gained the power it would now exercise, this is clear, that no other national Church or patriarchate owed originally

any allegiance or subjection to the Church of Rome ; that no other national Church or patriarchate could rightly be defrauded of their independence, or could barter it away to another power however great that might be ; and that if that right or independence had at any time, by any means, been given up or taken from them, that particular or national Church had a perfect and sacred right to reclaim their liberty and privileges again, whenever they were, as a body, able and willing to do so. And if the churchmen of the diocese of Utrecht manfully resisted the giving up of their lawful rights, they were justified in taking the steps they did to prevent the Pope depriving them of the full enjoyment of the sacred services of religion. This ban of an interdict was in itself a monstrous wrong, and a thing to be abhorred by all good men. The blame, then, for the persecution which à Kempis and his Brethren endured lay at the door of the papacy, and not at that of those who were contending for their just rights, and who strove to avert the evil machination of their enemies. And though Thomas and his Brethren yielded to the interdict, and, rather than break their vow of obedience, which they at least regarded as most sacred, would go into banishment and suffer this cruel treatment, yet had they alone to thank those who laid this iniquitous interdict upon the land ; an act which was not likely to increase their love or that of their countrymen for the papal system, which was exercised with such tyranny and heartlessness.

But to return to other matters during the period of their banishment. Thomas à Kempis records that, on December 14, 1430, our beloved Brother John, the priest, a native of Campen, died. He was the third who came after the four Brethren first invested with the Order. He died in the afternoon, and was buried on the left side of Brother Octbert ; that is, in the cemetery of Mount St. Agnes ; for we shall see from what is said below how this came about. This man wrote out particularly well many singing books for the choir. He was a good singer, modest in his demeanour, and was very useful and experienced in

various labours, especially during harvest time, and whilst the buildings of the monastery were going on. He had at the time of the expulsion proceeded with the Brethren to Friesland, but being very sick he desired to return to the monastery, and to remain along with the few laymen who had been left as guardians of the place. Afterwards his sickness increased upon him, and having fulfilled thirty-one years as a 'religious,' he slept in the Lord, before the rest of his Brethren returned.

In the year 1431, Brother Gossuin Becker¹ died at Lunenkerk on the festival of St. Stephen, Pope and martyr, in the third year of his being received as a 'religious,' and was buried there, in the precincts of the monastery.²

But the saddest thing for Thomas à Kempis was the sickness of his own brother John, for whom little hope of recovery was entertained. This led to Thomas leaving the Brethren in their exile, to visit and minister to his brother in his declining days. For fourteen months he was constantly by his side, watching over him, and attending to his every want with loving and fraternal solicitude, smoothing his pillow and aiding him in his preparation for his journey to another world. This brother had led, as we have already seen, a most exemplary life; he had done a great work in his day and generation, and had been the instrument in God's hands of turning many to righteousness. He was highly esteemed among 'the Brothers of Common Life,' and had on many occasions been chosen as the pioneer for extending their operations. But we shall here give the memorial account which Thomas records of him.

In the year 1432, on the fourth day of November at 12 o'clock at night, Brother John à Kempis died, the first Rector and Confessor of the Convent of Sisters at Bethania

¹ As the name Becker does not occur in the list Thomas gives, it was probably the person designated as the Baker, a novice, whose name was Gossuin.

² *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xxii.

near Arnheim, in the 67th year of his age. He was Rector or Prior in various places, and in several new Houses. He was the first Rector on the opening of the House at the Fountain of the Blessed Mary, near Arnheim, and invested several persons. Afterwards he was elected Prior of Mount St. Agnes, and presided there nine years. Then he was sent to Bommel, and began the House there with a few persons. Then again he was elected Prior of the House of the Blessed Mary near Haerlem, in Holland, where he presided seven years. He was also for some time with the monks in Bronopia, near Campen, where he was made the first Rector. At length he came to the House of Bethania, which, being interpreted, is the House of Obedience, where he ended his days happily in obedience, and in a good old age, and was buried within the cloisters after vespers, when I was present, since I had closed his eyes. For the 'Visitatores' had deputed me to be with him; and I remained with him one year and two months.

In the same year after Easter that House (Bethania) was incorporated into the General Chapter.¹

We find no other record of what these two saintly brothers said to each other at this solemn time, and how those fourteen months were passed. It is perhaps well that a veil is drawn over the sacred moments, and the devout communion they held one with the other respecting holy things, and the prospect of the being united together again in a happy eternity with their much beloved Saviour. Those whose privilege it has been to wait upon a dying saint, through long seasons of weariness, if not much of bodily suffering, will not have much difficulty in picturing to themselves the scene in that cell at Bethania, and how the brothers spent their time in tender sympathy, frequent prayer, and holy aspirations, longing for the light of blissful immortality. Sitting together in still silence amid the gathering twilight of a summer's evening, with

¹ *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, chap. xxiv.

its hallowing influence, we can imagine the sick brother recovering his strength a little, breaking the deep quietness that prevailed, and uttering some such words as these, which were once heard on a similar occasion :—

There is a secret in the ways of God
 With His own children which none others know,
 That sweetens all He does ; and if such peace,
 While under His afflicting rod we find,
 What will it be to see Him as He is,
 And past the reach of all that now disturbs
 The tranquil soul's repose? To contemplate,
 In retrospect unclouded, all the means
 By which His wisdom has prepar'd His saints
 For the vast weight of glory that remains.—*Swaine.*

And then at last the end came ; and Thomas was left alone, still a pilgrim on the earth, as he often felt and expressed himself to be ; and as he took a last fond look at that form, doubly dear to him, *i.e.* by natural ties and spiritual kinship, we could fancy ourselves listening to these other words of sacred minstrelsy :—

Servant of God, well done !
 Rest from thy loved employ,
 The battle fought, the victory won.
 Enter thy Master's joy.

The voice at midnight came,
 He started up to hear ;
 A mortal arrow pierc'd his frame,
 He fell — but felt no fear.

Tranquil amidst alarms,
 It found him on the field,
 A veteran slumbering on his arms,
 Beneath his red-cross shield.—*Montgomery.*

In the meantime the Brethren, from various parts, whither they had been scattered, were permitted to return again to their several Houses. When Eugenius IV. succeeded to the pontifical rule the Estates entreated his interference. He could not afford to treat the matter with the unconcern of his predecessor, for the Council of Basle was sitting. The Bishop of ' Matiskonensis ' ¹ was therefore

¹ Named thus after a city in the Duchy of Burgundy, called Mascon and latterly Macon.

sent as the Papal Legate, to make inquiries on the spot. He speedily made peace and removed the interdict against the illustrious Rodolph, the Bishop elect, and afterwards, as Buschius has it, 'the true Bishop of Utrecht.' For many prelates and religious persons assembled together in the town of Vianen to meet the aforesaid Legate, and after an amicable agreement had been come to, a bull was presently issued by Eugenius, declaring that his predecessor had been mistaken in refusing to confirm the election of Rodolph, that the crimes of Sweder were of the most gross and glaring character, and consequently he annulled all the acts of the intruder, and confirmed the election of Rodolph.

We may here further add that this Bishop survived the hard usage he had received twenty-two years, and governed his Church with great prudence. Sweder having in vain appealed to the Council of Basle, from whom he could obtain nothing but the empty title of Archbishop of Cæsarea, died of a broken heart in that city, not long after. His partisans chose Walraff, his early competitor, as his successor. He obtained the confirmation of the Duke of Savoy, called Felix V., in his obedience, and returned to Arnheim; and, more fortunate than his predecessor, was presented with the bishopric of Münster as his reward for ceasing to vex the Church of Utrecht.

In 1432,¹ when permission was given to the religious Brethren, to the devout clerics and canons, they returned to their respective places and monasteries, which they had left on account of their observing the papal interdict: 'bearing back with them sheaves of peace from the long exile, where they had remained beyond the diocese; praising God for His many mercies in all things; Who had smitten and could heal; Who had wounded and yet made

¹ Neale, in his *Jansenist Church of Holland*, gives the year 1433 for the issue of the bull, but both Buschius in his *Chronicles of Windesheim*, and Thomas à Kempis in his *Chronicles of Mt. St. Agnes*, give 1432 for the return of the Brethren. Besides the above-named works, the author is indebted for some of the particulars relative to the Church of Utrecht and this persecution, to two articles in the *Christian Remembrancer*.

whole; rejoicing in God and giving thanks that they could glory in His name, and that they were permitted to return before the festival of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.' ¹ This makes the date to be the 15th August. Thomas adds, that some did not return till the feast of St. Michael (29th September), and that a few of their Brethren were still left behind in Lunenkerc from necessity and for discipline; and then he concludes with the words, 'God, Who alone doeth marvellous things, be blessed for all His mercies.' ²

After the death of his brother John, Thomas à Kempis also returned to his monastery at Mount St. Agnes. It is probable that during his absence another Brother had been appointed to fill the office of Sub-prior, and that he remained for awhile in a private capacity, for we hear of his filling another office afterwards, and then being re-elected to be Sub-prior again. In the meantime he continued the Chronicles of his House, from which we shall give some further particulars in the next chapter.

¹ Buschius, *Chron. Windes.*, i. chap. xxxiv.

² *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, ch. xxiii.

CHAPTER XXII.

Events, 1433-1447—Investitures and deaths—An account of John Bowman—The interior life of à Kempis—His longing after Divine fruition—He is made Procurator of the monastery—Evidences of the kindness of his disposition, and thoughtfulness for the welfare of others—Passages from the 'Faithful Steward'—à Kempis naturally unsuited to be Procurator.

IN the present chapter I purpose to embrace the events of twenty years in the life of Thomas à Kempis, that is, from the time he was about fifty-two till he was seventy-two years old. In the quiet and regular life of a monastery one day succeeded another in much the same way; it was naturally less eventful and less exciting than that which is found by those who take a prominent and active part in the affairs of the world. Still there were necessarily changes, and a variety of occurrences happening, even in this secluded kind of life, which could not fail to stir the calm tranquillity which pervaded the place, and awaken in the breasts of its inmates deeper thoughts, and fresh sympathies and interests. From the particulars of events which transpired, and are recorded by à Kempis, we continue to gather what those things and circumstances were which affected the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes more or less, and broke in upon the even tenor of their ways, caused some concern for the time, and somewhat diverted their thoughts from their wonted channels. And there were changes not only going on around à Kempis, and among those whom he loved as dear friends, but in his own life also which we must notice.

It would appear that during the first part of this period of twenty years he was living among the Brethren without holding any special appointment. It had been necessary, when he was called to attend his own brother in his last

illness, to appoint another Sub-prior in his place, and now, when he returned to join the Brethren again, he took a place among them without any office. After awhile he was made procurator or bursar of the monastery. This post, however, he held only for a short period, and again became a private member of the community. Another important change shortly occurred in the monastery, and à Kempis is again chosen to fill the office of Sub-prior, which he continued to hold for some time. These changes will be severally noticed in the regular order of events as they occur, and while proceeding I shall gather from the writings of à Kempis as far as possible his own feelings and sentiments in the discharge of his duties, and in the promotion of spiritual life in himself and others.

In the year 1433 à Kempis records the investment, on the third Sunday in Lent, of three clerical Brethren : Brother Herman Craen of Campen, Brother John Zuermont of Utrecht, and Brother Peter Herbolt of the same place. These were received and welcomed among the Canons Regular in the usual manner.

In 1434, on the day of the Conception of the Virgin Mary (i.e. December 8), Brother Bero, a cleric of Amsterdam, was invested.

In the same year, on the 4th August, Margaret Wilden, a venerable matron, mother of our Octbert, died, and was buried in the broad passage at the head of her son's remains, in the north part of the cemetery that bounds our monastery.

Then occur the names of several others of the community who died ; and among them, à Kempis records that of Brother Alardus, a priest of Pilsum, an aged man, very courteous, who departed on the festival of the Finding of the Cross. He was more than seventy-six years old, and had been a 'religious' thirty years.¹ This man was

¹ It will be observed that à Kempis here and elsewhere uses the term 'religious ;' see *De Imit. Christi*, lib. i. xix. Formerly it was objected to by the Brothers, who lived without vows, but afterwards, when they established monasteries, those who entered them were appropriately so called.

diligent in celebrating mass, and was most devout. It was his endeavour to be always the first to enter the choir; and, until the infirmities of his last sickness prevented him, he was ever ready to assist and wait upon the Brethren in the common refectory. It had been his wish to die on the festival of Holy Cross, and he besought that his petition might be granted, because he was accustomed frequently to celebrate at the altar of the Holy Cross. And so it happened unto him. 'He was often wont to say unto me,' à Kempis tells us, 'that the best dish he got in the refectory was the sacred lesson to which he listened,' and that therefore he was unwilling to be absent at the time of eating lest he should lose the fruit of the sacred lesson. He said to à Kempis, moreover, 'I rejoice much at the sight of the Brethren, because I see the whole convent before me engaged in eating under wholesome discipline.' When through the infirmities of age he was at length so oppressed that he found it difficult to go alone, he would nevertheless often approach the gate of the choir with the help of a staff that he might hear the Brethren sing. And then he would take the water that had been blessed, and would reverently bow towards the high altar. He had several times been blessed with special consolations from God when he celebrated there.

In 1438 the deaths of two other Brethren are mentioned, and the investiture of six Brothers whose names and other particulars respecting them need not here be reproduced. À Kempis, however, here records that a great dearth happened this year in many parts, followed by a grievous pestilence.

I do not think it needful to give all the details of the Chronicle kept by à Kempis, lest it should prove tedious, I shall therefore continue to select only such other accounts of what happened as have some special interest in them. Among other matters he notices that:—

In the year 1440 the great house on the west side of the monastery was built for receiving strangers and lay friends. Its covered roof of stone was completed on the

festival of our Father, St. Augustine. In this work many of the Brethren laboured long and arduously.

In 1441 the plague again broke out. Several in the monastery were infected with it, and a few of the Brethren were cut off by it, among whom we notice Christianus, the 'Infirmarius.'

In this same year Thomas à Kempis finished a work on which he had been a long while engaged, and this was in writing out a fair copy of many of his own treatises in a neat, compact hand, so as to form a duodecimo volume: these are all bound together in a little thick book; and at the commencement all the four books of the 'De Imitatione Christi' are found, and form about a third of the whole volume. On the last page of the volume the signature of the author, Thomas à Kempis, with the date of its completion, is found subscribed. The book is still to be seen in the Royal Library, Brussels. It is a precious relic, and testifies to his diligence and ability in writing, the which were of much account before the invention of printing was fairly developed. We may here add that an exact *facsimile* of that portion of the book which contains the 'De Imitatione Christi' has been published, having been printed by a new photographic process, which reproduces the original page for page, with all the little abbreviations, alterations, and insertions, as well as gives the peculiar form of the letters and style of writing, and is to be had in a leather binding somewhat similar to that in which the old copy was originally bound.¹ It is of great interest to bibliographers,

¹ Published by Elliot Stock, Paternoster Row. An account of the trouble that was taken to reproduce this *De Imitatione Christi*, as written by the author, may probably interest the reader. It is thus alluded to:—'Difficulties of various kinds had to be surmounted, the elements having conspired to impede the progress of the work. Fire at the printer's destroyed twenty-five of the electro blocks; too much wetting spoiled one supply of the Dutch paper upon which the book had to be printed; and last year's summer heat—what there was of it—caused the animal size employed in making another supply to become bad. At length, however, the book is before us, and well repays the perseverance bestowed upon it. Of course, the cramped and abbreviated Latin manuscript, clear though every stroke may be, can be read only by an expert, but this in no way diminishes its value as a curiosity. The paper used is exactly similar to that of the original.'

and will be highly valued by those who love the 'Imitation.' A photographic facsimile of two of the pages of this work, written by à Kempis, was previously obtained by me with the permission of the authorities, and is to be found at the commencement of the book on the 'Authorship of the *De Imitatione Christi*,' as a specimen of the hand-writing of Thomas à Kempis, when he was about sixty-one.

Returning to the Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, à Kempis records that,—

In the year 1443 in the afternoon of St. Prisca's Day, the virgin and martyr, our beloved Brother and Priest, John Bowman, who for some time had been our Procurator, died. À Kempis writing briefly of him says that he had been a long time sick of the quartan fever, and being greatly weakened in body, he finished his life in a blessed conflict. He was a native of Zwolle, and though compassed with various infirmities faithfully performed many duties. Often had he this passage from our Saviour's discourse in his mouth: 'In your patience possess ye your souls.' And towards the close of his life, says à Kempis, when I visited him, he would exclaim with much earnestness, 'O how gladly would I go with the Brethren to the choir if I were able, God knows.' He was great in his compassion to the faithful, and gladly read, or someone read to him, the Life and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Almost a month before his death a certain Brother had the following vision after Matins. He saw before him the Brethren singing the vigils in the choir on the occasion of a funeral. And after the vigils he saw the gates of the choir open, and certain of our lay-brethren enter within, and stand near the corpse. Among them also appeared two deceased lay-brethren, coming as it were to follow the body to its last home, viz. John Eines and Herman Volter, who had died four years previously. These went out with the other members of the community, following the body through the gate to the south part, and went until you come to that boundary wall of the cloisters where our Brethren are wont to bury the priests: and then the vision

vanished. The Brother held his peace at that time respecting it, pondering the matter over in his mind, and thinking that probably in a little while some one of our Brethren might take his departure from this world, and we should sing for him the customary vigils for the dead. And so it came to pass; for when a month had gone by Brother John Bowman died, and that vision in the regular order of things was fulfilled in him. He was buried near Brother Christianus, and had lived in the Order of Canons Regular thirty-one years and twenty-six days.¹

The sickness and death of this Brother Bowman led to some change in the outward life of à Kempis. But before we notice this, we must for awhile glance back to see how it fared with à Kempis during this season while free from official duties, and able to live privately among the Brethren in greater retirement. We see how a great portion of this period had been filled up, and how usefully he had been employed in rewriting many of his devotional works. It is probable that he still continued to compose other little treatises on religious subjects, and performed the usual duties of a Brother; but the rewriting of his former works evidently was the main outward, manual employment which engaged his attention. A little insight respecting his inner life at this time, however, is the more desirable and particularly valuable. He had come back again into the still waters of a peaceful haven. Many years before, as will be remembered, he had passed through a great spiritual struggle. It had pleased God also to exercise him with some outward trials. He with his Brethren on the Mount had been driven from their quiet home, and had been strangers in a foreign country; and then he had been summoned to wait upon, and watch over, his own brother in his last sickness, all of which had called for the exercise of his faith and trust in God. The deep waters had gone over his soul, and he had been sorely tried; the storm, however, had passed away, and had now left behind it a fertilizing and sanctifying influence. A great calm

¹ *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, ch. xxiv.

had come upon him ; a deep peace together with a more settled reliance upon God had taken possession of him : he was living as one to whom an entrance had been given into the unseen world, as one who walked with God and was ripening for eternity, waiting for his Saviour's visible presence. Still he was not yet to be gathered into the heavenly garner ; the Lord had much work for His faithful servant to do, whilst living thus in an advanced state of Christian perfection.

Some words of à Kempis written some time before, ' On the Longing for the Divine Fruition,' will best describe his spiritual condition at this period ; for he now seemed to be indeed living by faith on the Son of God, his heart inflamed with love towards Him, and eagerly anticipating the time when he should behold His presence in glory. And it is to be observed how he was encouraged, and encouraged others, to persevere, by those gracious interviews with Jesus to which we have already drawn attention, when he felt the nearness of his Saviour's presence, and in lowly reverence kept silence before Him to catch the still small voice that was borne in upon his consciousness. This precious fellowship with God the Father and His Son our Lord which he richly enjoyed, mightily sustained his soul, ' until the day break and the shadows flee away.'

From the following soliloquy the reader will be able to form a fair idea of the inner life of à Kempis while resting in peaceful godliness :—

What can be sweeter, what can be more pleasant to the faithful soul, than to meditate devoutly on the Lord God her Beloved ; so that she may, as it were, make Him, Whom she cannot as yet behold in clear and beatific vision, present to herself by thoughtful recollection ?

Let her therefore contemplate Him through a glass darkly, Whom she cannot as yet see face to face. Let her none the less search for Him in the Scriptures, and in similitudes, Whom she cannot contemplate in His Own brightness.

Oh ! that the eagerness of seeking the face of the Lord might never cool in me, but burn more fervently day by day !

Now in the soul that loves God, there is an ever-increasing

fervour to enjoy the sight of Him ; because the vision of God is the highest blessedness, and consummate happiness.

The soul longs therefore for this blessedness, until her whole appetite, united to this end, is satiated and appeased : nor can she be contented instead with any present good.

For she hath learnt by frequent experience that the more she wanders from heavenly blessedness, she is the more unhappy and disquieted, since there is nothing stable or lasting in the creatures, by which her appetite can be assuaged.

Let her return, then, to Him by Whom she was made ; and ask for blessedness from Him from Whom she originated : for He indeed Who created the soul, alone can satisfy her longings with good things.

For He hath planted such an affection within her, that when He is taken away, there is no good by which she can be contented ; no pleasure which she can safely enjoy.

Tarry not here, my soul, because this world is not the place of thy rest ; but rise upwards, and ascend to Him Who made thee. For He hath even already sent His messengers, and invited thee to ascend.

The many longings for Eternal Life which He inspires in thee, are so many messengers He sends unto thee ; and when thou hast received them, prepare thyself to go to Him.

Thou walkest towards Him, when thou longest to see Him, when thou strivest to please Him, when thou renouncest inferior things, when for love of Him thou doest whatever is to be done, and omittest whatever is to be left undone.

For thou couldst not first have sought Him, unless He had first sought thee, and awakened holy desires within thee. For in truth that soul languishes, not with love, but with pernicious weariness, which hath not been irradiated with the beams of the Eternal Sun.

But if she is freed from cold and sorrow when the south wind sweetly blows, then, with longings after the inspired Light, she begins to burn for the secret Presence of the Incomprehensible Divinity.

Oh, the intense glow of the true Sun ! What fervour dost Thou beget in the loving soul. Thou dispersest the darkness of sadness, and changest laborious deeds to be as nothing. By one single gleam Thou abundantly comfortest for long days and years of poverty. O medicine of the sorrowful, bright lamp for wandering and inquiring souls, shine Thou constantly upon me ; take up Thy abode with me, till the everlasting light bursts forth.

Oh, how sweet and pleasant will Thy Presence be, when from the memory of It alone so many joys arise ! How gladly do I turn myself to Thee ! how freely renounce all, to be comforted with Thy grace.

For it will not be a difficult matter, for the soul longing to behold Thy face, to strip herself of all delight in things present, when she can experience greater within, or confidently expects before long to enjoy a profusion from Thee.

Besides, let none foolishly imagine, that Thou wilt for a long time leave the soul un comforted that is devoted to Thee ; or that she will receive but small endearing gifts of grace for all the victories over nature :

For neither in quality nor quantity of sweetness, can any earthly delight of whatsoever sort be compared to Thy heavenly consolation.

Here à Kempis seems to have paused awhile, and then addressing his own soul, or some dear friend who is conferring with him on sacred matters, or one whom he would incite to follow that blessed life which is 'hid with Christ in God,' he continues :—

Labour then, faithful soul, to show thyse'f to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom in such wise, that thou mayest ever be worthy of His grace and consolation ; since by Him, and in Him, thou wilt most plentifully find that which will be able to console thee in every anxiety.

The more frequently thou drawest nigh to Him, and the more closely thou cleavest to His side, so much the sweeter and pleasanter will He appear to thee.

But if thou withdraw thyself, thou alone wilt suffer harm ; since He, remaining in His beauty, will feel no sorrow or trouble. Thou standest in need of His goodness, He of none.

Therefore thou art capable of being made happier by Him ; He cannot be by thy advancement. He alone is sufficient in Himself ; the only One, to Whom nothing can be added, and from Whom nothing can be taken.

Whatever things exist, whatever lives, feels, and understands, are of His grace. Meet it is, therefore, that all created things do laud and bless Him.

O that I could but sufficiently declare and unfold Him to thee ; how gladly would I do so ! But that which is ineffable cannot be expressed as it really is. Likewise what is inconceivable cannot be comprehended by any thought or voice.

And since this be so, still meanwhile think after the manner of men respecting the Creator, consoling thyself with the memory of His sweetness, until He show thee the presence of His countenance in the Kingdom.¹

While these words are still fresh in our minds, it is worth while again to notice the striking similarity there is between the pious sentiments here uttered, and the devout expressions found in the 'De Imitatione Christi.' We point out two portions in which the very tone and peculiar shade of expression are to be found which seem to indicate that both proceeded from the same mind. The first is in Book IV. Chapter XIII. sec. 1. The other is one before pointed out in Book II. Chapter I. secs. 1-2. Other portions might be referred to, but it will not be difficult for a moderately cultivated ear to trace a marked resemblance between the two works, and to come to a conclusion that the author of 'The Soliloquy of the Soul' is also the author of 'The Imitation of Christ.' We turn now again to the outer life of à Kempis. It was on, or shortly before, the death of John Bowman that he was probably chosen to fill the office of Procurator or Bursar of the monastery. From what à Kempis says it is apparent that he was in close communication with Bowman towards the latter end of his life, when infirmities crept upon him and unfitted him for discharging his duties efficiently. And in the absence of more positive information, as to the exact time when à Kempis was made Procurator, it is presumed that he was led to see Bowman more particularly when he was sick, that he might ascertain from him the several duties of the new office he had to fill, and how he could best discharge them.

Now the duties of the Procurator consisted in having the charge and oversight of household matters. He had to receive the moneys belonging to the monastery, to keep the accounts, to see that the debts were paid, to attend to the due distribution of alms, and to mind that the poor and needy were cared for. He had to take charge of

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, chap. xix.

strangers, and see that they were properly entertained ; he had under his control the lay-brethren and the youths preparing to be clerics. And once a fortnight he held a kind of court to receive reports of what was going on, to examine into the conduct of those over whom he held rule, and to hear and rectify any complaints or disorders brought to his notice ; when, as occasion needed, he either censured those in fault—exhorting them to give more heed to their duties in the future—or inflicted some punishment upon them. In the performance of this latter duty we may imagine that à Kempis was inclined to be lenient, for he was tender-hearted towards others, though severe with himself ; but otherwise, his biographer, Badius Ascensius, tells us, he discharged the office of Procurator with becoming diligence.

When we consider, however, the kind of duties he had to discharge, it seems singular that one of so retiring a disposition, and of so introverted a turn of mind, should have been chosen to fill such an office. Though à Kempis was one that would endeavour faithfully to discharge the duties of any post he was called upon to undertake to the best of his ability, the present calling was not one in some ways congenial to him ; and from what we learn shortly after, we find that the Brethren, seeing this, kindly relieved him of the office, and appointed another who was more fitted for it.

But before following him to his giving up the office of Procurator, I would draw attention to the reason which is assigned by his biographer, Badius Ascensius, for his being chosen ; for he tells us that it was on account of his charitable disposition and kindness of heart—his being prone to the distribution of alms—that the Brethren elected à Kempis to fill this post.¹ Another of his early biographers also informs us that ‘it would be beyond his power to transmit to posterity his love of God, and with what love and benevolence he was inflamed towards the Brethren.’²

¹ *Vita R. P. Thom. à Kempis*, chap. xii. sec. 4.

² Francis Tolensis, *Vita Thom. à Kempis*, sec. 9.

Mooren also states that it was for his gentle and social disposition that he was made Procurator.¹ And we draw attention to this feature in the character of Thomas à Kempis, because it may be imagined, as it has been intimated by some respectable authors, that the author of the 'De Imitatione Christi' was so absorbed in cultivating the interior life, in those mystic intercommunion with our Lord, and in other devout exercises, that he was heedless of what was going on around him, and gave little consideration to the welfare of others; that, in short, he was so wrapped up in the enthusiasm of religious devotions and pursuits, or in the attainment of his own salvation, that he had got into a state of mind above and beyond exercising kind thought and sympathy and making efforts for his fellow creatures, or caring what became of them. This could certainly not be brought against Thomas à Kempis with any fairness, as can be shown, any more than it could be respecting several of whom he writes. For though his mind was much given to study and devout exercises, which are apt to draw off the attention from outward things, and make one less ready and alive to worldly pursuits, still his religion was not a selfish one, it did not render him indifferent to the welfare of others; the essential characteristics of Christian life, especially that of love towards his fellow man, were not wanting in him.

A certain amount of prejudice has been raised against him from his living in a monastery; pre judging that his religion was such as is popularly attributed to that condition of life; without taking into consideration the real character of the man, or the reformed character of the monastery or Brotherhood to which he belonged. Nor ought it to be inferred from his thorough earnestness in seeking *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness before all things else, that he was negligent of his duties towards his neighbours: and it is needful to repeat, that his loving Christ with such an intense devotion as to count all things as but dross in comparison of Him, ought not to

Nachrichten über T. à K., p. 139.

imply a want of sympathy and kindness towards the Brethren, the poor, or those in distress. On the contrary, the love of God, if properly received into the heart, should lead us to love our neighbours as ourselves ; and, the being much with Christ and finding delight in following Him, should make us the more like to Him, Who went about doing good, and lead us to seek occasions whereby to benefit those about us.

In considering for awhile, then, some fresh evidence as to whether Thomas à Kempis was one who loved his fellow-kind, as well as God his Saviour—for we do not forget that there are those who profess to love God much, and yet show little affection, and make less exertion, and still less sacrifice, for the real welfare of their fellow creatures—we must take largely into account the great work that à Kempis accomplished in his life, in writing those many devotional works which he composed with great care, often abstracting time from the hours of sleep and recreation, that he might produce something that would be of some help, and do some good to others. It was not for fame—to make himself a name—that he wrote what he did, else he would not have striven as far as he could to lie concealed from the notice and observation of the world. No, it was not to gain the applause of the world, as many hope to do, that he laboured so diligently, but with the conscious desire of leading others to Christ, that they also might find rest, and peace, and salvation in Him. And though he must necessarily abstract himself much from his fellow men—and even found it greatly to his spiritual advantage to do so—yet was he continually thinking of their welfare, and how he could benefit them by what he could say or do for them : and may we not say, Praised be God ! his labour in the Lord has not been in vain ; for thousands have risen up to thank God for what he has written, and for the comfort and encouragement he has given them to persevere in attaining to higher degrees of grace in the Christian life.

There is an emblematic portrait of Thomas à Kempis,

in which he is represented as beholding Christ by faith and with ardent love, and how he was influenced thereby, which shows us what others thought of his religious life in days gone by, when they were better able to judge of him, from what they heard about him from those who knew him, than those in these latter days who seem not to gauge his character aright. This picture of him is very instructive. We see depicted on his countenance the joy he felt in his religion; his face seems to beam with ecstatic delight while he holds communion with Christ his Beloved. His Saviour is represented as looking graciously upon him from above the clouds of glory with the Cross in His arms; and the consideration of what Christ endured upon that cross for him, and the great love of God which it manifested, seem to inflame his heart with love, not only to God but to man also; for a beam of light appears to come from Christ, and sets the heart of à Kempis on fire, so that the flames from it ascend upwards, as if in grateful adoration to the Redeemer; and then from that heart thus touched and inflamed by Divine love, another beam of light comes and falls upon the world, represented by a globe near his feet, which is in turn warmed and inflamed with the fire of the Divine love kindled within him, and coming from him. This picture is not to be treasured up so much for truly delineating the outward features of à Kempis—this we probably have in two or three other portraits of him; but it is much to be valued on account of its setting forth, and depicting in a vivid manner, the true character of the inner man, showing that the religion of à Kempis was indeed like unto that which distinguished Christ and His Apostles, and which is to be found more or less in all the faithful followers of the Lamb of God—was indeed a life of service and sacrifice, a life burning with the desire to help and to save his fellow kind.

There is another kind of evidence, the result in some measure probably of the experience he obtained in discharging the duties of Procurator, which should have great weight in assuring us that love towards his neighbour was

a grand principle within à Kempis ; actuating his life and permeating the counsels he gave. This evidence is in the form of a short treatise, ' Concerning the Faithful Steward,' and from it we would judge that he must have in no small degree given himself to charitable works, or he would not have felt himself competent to instruct others engaged in them. The salutary advice and the cautions which he gives are well worthy the attention of those who engage in good works, and are benevolently disposed to employ their time and talents for the good of others in these days ; and seem well calculated to promote the advancement of all outward works of piety and charity, as well as to establish the character of à Kempis for being unselfish and very charitably disposed, whilst he was at the same time deeply religious : we shall therefore give a few quotations from it, that the reader may form some idea of it. He thus commences his brotherly charge :—

Since you have now, my dear Friend, undertaken the office of Martha,¹ you must take care that so good and holy an office is not slothfully or carelessly performed, but faithfully executed for Christ's sake, Who ministers all things to us ; and that you exercise this service so as to further your own Eternal Salvation. In the discharge thereof there are certain necessary considerations concerning which you should be admonished, forasmuch as the blessed Paul saith, ' Moreover it is required in Stewards that a man be found faithful.'

Whence it behoves him to be *faithful* to whom such a stewardship is committed ; and none the less also *prudent* that he may not fall into frequent mistakes. Faithful let him be in that which is intrusted to him, that he neglects no business affairs, that he does not through carelessness suffer any thing to be spoiled or wasted which may be of use or advantage to the community, but rather see to its being preserved with pious care.

Prudent also must he be in the distribution of things, both with respect to time and person. For at one time it is convenient to give, what at another time it may be proper to refuse. And to some persons it is both profitable and charitable to yield and grant their requests, whereas to others it behoveth thee to deny them.

¹ This term was applied to men as well as to women, who gave themselves more exclusively to outward works of charity.

And the necessities of some worthy persons are by your good offices to be prevented, or attended to even before any application to you be made on their behalf.

If, therefore, you act discreetly and weigh the necessities of individuals, you cannot be said to act imprudently. And if you be compassionate to the sick and infirm, and take pity on the helpless and necessitous, considering their condition as if it were your own, after what manner, and in what ways you can do them good, then you have put on charity. Such I desire thee to be, viz. faithful in thy duties, and prudent in counsel.

And doth not our Lord in the Gospel require such a servant as this? 'Who then,' saith He, 'is a faithful and wise servant whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?' This is spoken for you, if you be but faithful: though you ought not to esteem yourself wise, for St. Paul says, 'Be not wise in your own conceits;' and again, 'Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.' For the wise thinking thus concerning themselves, are thereby rendered wiser. But who is that faithful servant unless it be he who seeketh not his own, but the things of Christ Jesus, so that whatever he doeth, he does from love of Him, desiring and expecting nothing from it but His glory only, and who follows the will of Christ rather than his own; and can say, 'Father, not my will, but Thine be done.'

Of the two servants, therefore, the faithful is to be chosen before the prudent, and should be instructed in the way of transacting business; inasmuch as nothing is more valuable in a house than a faithful servant; and nothing can weigh in the balance against a faithful friend, especially in giving counsel.

But what is it, you will say, which makes a man so faithful and in concord with the heart of God, and can therefore be thoroughly trusted? In the first place, the fear of the Lord especially; then love without dissimulation; and lastly, not seeking any private advantage: these qualifications constitute a faithful servant.

And such an one was that chosen vessel St. Paul, to whom so many precious and sublime secrets were intrusted. For he was found faithful in the house of God, and acted prudently in all things: whence he says, 'not seeking mine own profit, but that of many;' ¹ also, 'I seek not yours, but you;' ² and, 'I desire not a gift, but first that it may abound to your account.' ³

Speaking upon the value of a faithful man in several relations of life, and saying that there were several such

¹ 1 Cor. x. 33.

² 2 Cor. xii. 14.

³ Phil. iv. 17.

individuals in their Society, known to the person he addresses, à Kempis tells him, that since he admires the conduct of these men, and desires to imitate them, he does well to tread in their steps ; and bids him not to stop short of that perfection, in the discharge of the duties of his office, which is so justly praiseworthy in them. And when conscious of failures, he must make use of them to correct and improve himself, to set matters right again, so that no one may have cause to complain, but everyone to rejoice in his service. And then he assures him, that if he strives to fulfil his duties to the utmost of his power, though he may now and then come short, God will be gracious unto him, and have pity on his infirmities and insufficiency. Thomas then shows him how he ought to act, and how he ought to exercise his trust in God in times of great scarcity, whilst manifesting a generous and compassionate disposition, for he says :—

In a house where poverty abounds, and there are many fellow commoners, do not become more straitened in your way of ministering ; nor on this account abandon your pious administrations, but exercise confidence in the commiseration of God. Wherefore in the Gospel you have these words of Christ, ‘ I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days and have nothing to eat ; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way.’¹ Now the Disciples had said, ‘ Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns to buy food.’ But Jesus said unto them, ‘ Give ye them to eat,’ that He might prove them, as to what faith they had in Him, considering so large a multitude with such a scanty provision of bread and fishes. They, despairing of a sufficiency, said, ‘ But what are these among so many?’ Hear now what the most gracious Lord said to these doubts. ‘ Make the men sit down.’ Then He took the loaves and blessed them, and ordered His Disciples to apportion them to the multitude. And they did eat and were filled, and an abundance of fragments remained.

From this lesson, continues Thomas, learn what faith is able to do ; and how you must not despair, but patiently wait, when you have not sufficient. Give what you can, and the Lord will provide for the future. The faith of good men in times of necessity is very

¹ St. Mark viii. 2, 3.

strong ; neither are they cast down, unless they place more hope on human means than on Divine help.

You have heard from others instances of faith answered. But have you never even experienced this yourself? Let me tell you what I heard from a Brother whose word was to be trusted. There were in a certain house a great many poor people to be fed, when provisions were wanting. Whereupon the Brethren agreed to go out to fish, and having cast their net for the fishes, they caught as many as there were guests to be entertained. Whereupon the Brethren considering this, gave thanks unto God, because the Lord had so graciously provided for them.

If then you will be ready, it is accepted of God according to what you have, and not according to what you have not. When there is deficiency of means excuse is indeed easy ; only do not hold back anything you have, or fear the consequences of penury. Whilst there is yet a good Providence too great parsimony, however it may seem to be needed, is to be avoided. ‘Give,’ saith the Giver of all things, ‘and it shall be given unto you.’ So long, therefore, as thou hast but one loaf, thou must share it with Christ ; for it will be given to you again in numberless kindnesses, both here and hereafter. It is said of the good man, ‘He hath dispersed abroad and given to the poor ; his righteousness remaineth for ever.’¹

Let, then, your liberality always be known in the fear of God, with a delight in men, and a hatred of vices. Seek much rather to be doing acts of kindness, than holding back what you have till to-morrow. He who gives to-day will give to-morrow also. Neither is that given to a miser (if I may so say) that is given to Christ, or to One who holds fast, or to an ungrateful person, or to One who knows not what you do, or who is forgetful of it, so that you need not be solicitous concerning your expenses, or be led to say, ‘Who shall give to us, what has gone to others?’

Let your eyes be ever looking to the Lord, since there is no want to them that fear Him. The rich have wanted, and not been satisfied ; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. Hope in the Lord then, and be doing good ; do not let occasions slip of being bountiful, but say confidently unto the Lord with the prophet, ‘The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season : Thou openest Thine hand, and fillest all things living with plenteousness.’²

Thus your good desires will be perfectly fulfilled in a few things, and shew what you would wish to do, were you in possession of

¹ Ps. cxii. 9.

² Ps. cxlv. 15, 16.

great riches. Whosoever is prepared to give a small portion when he has but little for himself, will not be backward to give what is greater, when it shall please God to increase his store. From a little you may be able to calculate what you would do, had you much.

To be too anxious for the morrow is the part of human frailty ; but not to use freely those things which God hath sent doth shew the miser. There is always want to the covetous ; but to him who trusteth in God the whole world is full of riches. Take heed, therefore, lest the loss of temporal things bring hurt to thee in spiritual : and if the riches of this world fail you, let not your faith fail you. Nay, rather believe magnificently concerning the providence of God.

He Who hath promised Heavenly and Eternal things, will not deny thee temporal. Nevertheless He does not always give according to our will and liking, lest we, abounding in worldly goods, should therefore the less desire those things which are above in Heaven.

For one engaged in temporal business, it is scarcely possible that he can be without such imperfection, but that he should often be captivated with the desire of earthly things, viz. with the love of possessing them, or with the fear of losing them. Whence it is my opinion that no man can fully know himself, or understand the affections of his own heart, unless he has begun to transact temporal affairs, and had some outward cares.

Notwithstanding which, those who are occupied therein, and yet have the love of the Creator fixed in their hearts in preference to the creature, do not so easily fall into a fault. And if it happen that they perceive that they have sometimes failed in a little matter, they hasten to cleanse their conscience.

It would almost appear from these latter sentiments, and from the advice he gives towards the close, that though à Kempis set a high value upon a religious or conventual life, he by no means excludes from grace the man engaging in business, if it be carried on in the fear and the love of God ; but that, on the other hand, if but godly disposed, it may have the effect of testing and leading a man to know his own heart, and to guard against the evil that is in the world. And now Thomas proceeds to give some sound practical advice, with certain directions for promoting the spiritual welfare of charitable workers and those

whom they desire to benefit ; from which it may be discerned how intimately acquainted he was with beneficent operations.

Now for your instruction ; habituate yourself to a little prudent meditation beforehand, concerning the business you have to transact. Some persons are more dilatory than they should be in what they do ; whilst others are somewhat more precipitate. The tardy often omit doing, or else having made a small beginning, they do not persevere in their work. Whilst they who are too vivacious often run on inconsiderately, and easily fall into mistakes. Hence virtue always consists in a middle course. Wherefore you ought to observe the measure of your ability, and to ponder well what is wont to be said, ‘ He doeth much, who doeth well what he ought to do.’

It is necessary that there be found in you not only some prudence, but that you be humble, religious, and modest ; lest you should seem to be proud, austere, and bold, as if you were doing things in an authoritative way, or imperiously. It is much better that you should mildly entreat, than haughtily order those things to be done, which you think needful. You will be prudent, if you seem to avoid prudence.

Among various other pious admonitions to his friend, such as looking into his own heart to see what should at all times be done, bringing all his cares to the feet of Jesus, loving justice, hating iniquity, avoiding anger, concupiscence, flattery, and avarice, Thomas à Kempis proceeds to say :—

So order your actions and all your outward labours that you may secure a certain portion of the day for prayer, reading, and meditating upon the Holy Scriptures. If you are able, follow the example of the Prophet in the Psalms, and say, ‘ In the evening and morning, and at noon-day will I pray, and cry aloud ; and He shall hear my voice.’¹

Consider also the verses following in the same Psalm, and they will teach you how to go about your business, and trust in God. How many there are who run about after many things, but one receiveth the prize. The mind is often distracted with business, and therefore after business it should return to its oneness ; because in that unity it learns many useful things.

You can always find sufficient time for yourself, if you do not

¹ Ps. lv. 17.

indulge in idleness ; not only for necessary duties, but also for pious discourse, and recollectedness of spirit. Blessed is the man who watcheth constantly that he may recollect himself ; that he may not through carelessness slide from darkness to darkness.

Upon the ordering of his *words*, Thomas à Kempis gives this counsel :—

Keep a diligent watch also over the words of your mouth, that you may not afterwards repent of anything that you have said. He who has to converse with many, has much greater need to watch ; because his conversation will be examined and canvassed by every one. Never give occasion for dissolute conduct through unseemly words or vain intimations, because this lightness is productive of a twofold evil ; it does away in others with the influence of a good example, in thyself with a holy resolution.

With those, however, who are of a child-like and devout spirit, and who have a relish for religion, speak more freely, and associate with them more frequently. And as to those who do not altogether agree with you, yield to them for the sake of your peace and theirs, because our Defender and our Judge, Jesus Christ, knows clearly what we are inwardly, before Whom human judgments are most frequently erroneous.

If you desire to edify any one it is better to speak to him alone ; because that which one or two will gladly hear, is oftentimes displeasing to a number. Do not discuss questions relating to Holy Scriptures in a common audience ; nor speak freely to them on high and curious subjects. But whatsoever will promote humility, virtue, amiability, devotion ; and whatsoever will incite others to the love of Christ, to peace, modesty, and uprightness before God and men, upon these things speak and exhort.

The devout conference of two persons, studiously inclined, and of like mind, who agree well with thyself, will be of great advantage in the attainment of sacred knowledge. Hence our Saviour saith, ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them :’ and again, ‘Whilst they were yet speaking these things Jesus stood in the midst of His disciples and said unto them, Peace be unto you.’ Conference, therefore, upon the Holy Scriptures is commendable ; for through it we more easily shun carnal things, and the love of ease.

Passing over many more points of instruction, it is desirable to notice what à Kempis says with regard to the difference between the works of a Martha and a Mary, with

a few parting words of advice to those who choose the part of the former.

Although the part of Mary may be the more eligible and agreeable, yet the laborious part of her blessed sister Martha was laudable, and accepted of God ; even as our Lord Himself testifies in the Gospel, saying, ‘ If any man serve Me, him will My Father, Who is in Heaven, honour.’¹ To serve especially belongs to Martha, even as to be still is the portion of Mary ; but then these two sisters ought not to be separated the one from the other, neither ought they to contend about their several states ; but rather let them both in their respective ways study to entertain Christ, that they may be able to stand perfect in all things, and daily make advances in the exercise of virtue.

Let Martha therefore serve, labour, and provide good things before God and men, that so her sister Mary may be the more disengaged to attend upon Divine things. Nor let her murmur against her sister, that she hath left her alone to serve, but rather let her encourage her, that she may keep herself in quietness and silence, without encumbering herself with worldly business. Let her listen to Jesus, and wonder at the gracious words that proceed out of His mouth ; so that she may have Him always before her eyes, Whom the angels desire to look upon.

But hear thou, who with Martha art cumbered with much serving. Take heed that thou be not disturbed in thy work, and that thou faint not in tribulation, because there will be abundant occasions of trouble ; and a variety of adversities, and difficulties will not be wanting. Blessed, however, wilt thou be if thou take all things patiently ; and profitably receivest both the evil and the good from God, with thanksgiving.

You will always then have need of patience and prudence ; that through patience you may overcome all manner of evil ; and through prudence graciously dispense the good things of this life to others, although they be ungrateful. For consider well Whom you serve, and what will be the reward of your labours. Is it not Christ, to Whom you have wholly offered yourself ? You are His Martha ; and His will you should fulfil, lest you offend Him and sin. The Lord is mighty to give you greater grace, and even to shew you His glory ; so that you, who so diligently and devoutly serve Him in the world, may at length be called to sit down with Him in His kingdom.

Wherefore, Martha, be of good cheer, for great shall be your

¹ St. John xii. 26.

reward in heaven ; only be thou faithful in thy ministrations. For whatever you lay out in the service of Christ's brethren, the just Judge will recompense thee in the day of Judgment. When thou omittest to seek thine own pleasure and profit in some way, or when thou postponest some spiritual work, that thou mayest attend to the necessities of others, then thou obtainest from Christ the reward of Everlasting Life, and He becomes to thee the precious and firm Surety of Eternal glory. Whence He speaks after this manner to the Father : 'I will, that where I am, there shall also My servant be.'

O Martha ! what a world of good you may perform, if you are only willing and prepared. The servants of Christ stand in need of your service ; and without your care the children of God are neglected. If then you would make your labour acceptable, do it heartily, not grudgingly or wearily. You are able to exercise great charity towards the poor brethren ; to bring great joy to the members of Christ, that hunger and thirst, and are destitute of necessary things, by apportioning those things which the Lord hath bestowed for the infirmities of the human body.

Remember what the Patriarch Isaac said to his son Esau, 'Make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless thee.' In like manner shall every one bless thee, O Martha ! who in the name of Christ shall be refreshed with food and drink through your ministrations : neither shall this blessing of theirs be some return of certain temporal benefits, but rather the sure pledge and foretaste of Eternal inheritance.¹

Few will doubt from the sentiments contained in this address to one who undertook the office of Martha but that Thomas à Kempis was intimately conversant with all charitable operations, and speaks from experience as one who had himself been engaged in them. It is at once evident that he was liberal-minded and benevolent—willing to share with the poor the last penny that he had. Taking into consideration what his contemporary biographer says as to the reason of his being chosen to fill the office of Procurator—the great care and labour he must have expended in the production of his numerous works—the emblematic portrait of him as to how he was esteemed in past time—and then the exhortation of the Faithful

¹ *De Fidelis Dispensatore*, p. 157.

steward—from all these, it is apparent that he not only cared for the souls of his fellow creatures, but for their bodies also: and anxiously endeavoured to provide for their temporal necessities as well as their spiritual; so that consider the matter in what way you will, either religiously or socially, you can scarcely imagine a less selfish man than Thomas à Kempis was. Sufficient, however, has now been said to set this question at rest, for those who are content with reasonable evidence.

In reference to his tenure of the office of Procurator of the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes, it is clear that he did not long retain it. The bent of his mind was not in the charge or discharge of business; he was not naturally fitted or disposed, as some are, to deal with outward things. He was essentially more of a reflective and meditative turn of mind; and he felt within himself that he was not called to the serving of tables, and that he could serve God better, and be of greater service to His people, by giving himself more entirely to prayer, and the ministry of the Word. And it is probable that he anxiously besought that he might be relieved of the post he held. There were others more fitted for, and more inclined to the discharge of, business matters and looking after the secular affairs of the place than he was, while he himself would be better employed in attending to more spiritual works, and in the advancement of true godliness in himself and those around him. So, as his contemporary biographer has it, ‘because he was much given to the interior life and devout matters,¹ and consequently somewhat simple in temporal affairs, he was released from the office of Procurator.’ He was not, however, long permitted to remain a private member of the community; for, as we shall perceive from what shortly afterwards happened, he was again appointed to a post which he had formerly held, and filled to the great satisfaction of the Prior and his Brethren.

¹ ‘Quia multum fuit internus et devotus.’—*Opera et libri vite fratris Thome de Kempis*, folio lxxxvi. Nuremb. 1494.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Events, 1447-1453—The resignation of the third Prior of Mount St. Agnes—he mode of electing his successor—À Kempis the second time made Subprior—Mention of several calamities that happened—Notices of Brethren who died—Words of comfort to the afflicted—À Kempis receiving a young man out of the world—The spiritual intercourse of à Kempis with the novices—Anecdotes about the religious life.

RETURNING, therefore, to the records of the Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, we find that the next event of moment that occurred after the election of à Kempis to be Procurator, caused no little stir and anxiety among the Brethren, since the Prior—who had presided over the monastery many years, and with whom Thomas à Kempis, from the requirements of the offices he held, was more closely associated than the rest—now sought to resign his office and retire, so as to be but an ordinary Brother among them. This led to the election of another ruler over the House, and to other changes which have some interest in them. I shall recount them, however, in the manner in which à Kempis records them.

In the year 1447 Theodoric Clive, the third Prior in the Mount—having governed the House for twenty-three years with fraternal solicitude, and being borne down by many duties—did humbly beseech the Brethren assembled in Chapter, that he might be relieved of his office, alleging the weakness of old age, and secret infirmities of the body. The Brethren felt a deep compassion for their pious Father, who had served them so long, and kindly listening to his request, gave their consent.

But the matter was not so easily settled, continues à Kempis. It was necessary to have the consent of the General Chapter of the Mother-House at Windesheim,

and the approval of the Priors of the other Houses. A private inquiry was, therefore, instituted by them of the Brethren at the Mount; and it was only when they found that the greater part were of one accord in the matter, and but a few of the younger Brethren dissented, that they, as the proper authority, granted the Prior absolution from his office, and thereby relieved him of his burden; which was done on the day in which the Church commemorates the Dispersion of the Apostles.

Then, according to the Statutes of the Brotherhood, the Prior of Amsterdam and the Prior of Hoern, who had been appointed to carry out the aforesaid investigation, enjoined upon the Brethren the observance of a three days' fast before they proceeded to the election of a new Prior. This done, they, on account of the necessities of their own monasteries, returned to Holland, and committed to the venerable Prior of Windesheim the business of managing the election of another Prior, enjoining him that he would go, and personally see, that a worthy person was chosen by the Brethren for the office. This was accordingly done by the Providence of Divine Grace. Fervent prayers were offered up to God in public and in private, invoking the help of the Holy Spirit, and the petition of the Brethren for a new Prior came quickly to a good end.¹

The name of this new Prior was Brother Henry of Deventer. The particulars of his election are thus given by Thomas. On June 20, 1448, after the three days' fast, all the Brethren assembled together to sing the Mass of the Holy Spirit. Soon after this had been finished, Sext being ended, the Brethren went from the choir to the Chapter-house for the election of the new Prior. Then the venerable Prior of Windesheim came as desired with the Prior of Zwolle, to take charge thereof. Having given a brief collation or address, and read aloud the form of election, he admonished each of the Chapter, that by the gracious will of God, and in accordance with the Canon law, they should choose a suitable person to be their Prior.

¹ *Chronicles Mt. St. Agnes*, Thom. à Kempis, chap. xxv.

The number of Brethren present who had the right of election was twenty-one. There were two other Brothers who had been a long time absent, who had written letters expressive of their wish. The Brethren that were electors having then departed one by one out of the door of the Chapter-house, leaving the entrance open, the two afore-said Priors, with the three senior Brethren of the monastery, came and stood near the altar which is in the Chapter-house, for the purpose of hearing and receiving the decision and vote of each of the Brethren; a position where they could be seen by all, but could not be audibly heard by any of those who stood outside the doors. Then having made a scrutiny of the votes after hearing what each of them in turn had to say respecting their choice, it was found that our Brother, the Sub-prior, Henry Wilhelm of Deventer, had been nominated and elected, having sixteen votes inscribed upon the paper, which gave him a majority. There remained some who had not registered their votes for him; among whom were the three senior Brethren who had been auditors: and two of the other Brethren gave their votes in favour of the Procurator, John Cluyt, who had but lately been placed in this office, as successor to Thomas à Kempis. Then one of the senior Brethren on behalf of himself and of the majority demanded a confirmation of the election from the superior Prior, who speedily put an end to any opposition by declaring that he would do this on the morrow.

Then, no further opposition being made, nor any charge brought against the method of election, and no one having anything to say against the character of the individual elected, the Prior elect was called upon to consent to the choice of himself, since the election had been canonically made, and it was necessary that the rite should be duly confirmed. Upon this he immediately came forward, and prostrating himself in the midst of the Brethren, protested his own insufficiency, and humbly besought that he might not have the burden and responsibility laid upon him. But when he found that his entreaties could not prevail,

and that it was useless pertinaciously to resist ; and being at length overcome by the urgency of the Brethren, as well as impelled by obedience to the will of his superior, he yielded his consent with an humble voice ; and for the sake of brotherly love, and the necessary discipline of the monastery, he took upon himself the divine appointment. He was then fully installed into the office by the Prior of Windesheim, being conducted to the choir in the presence of the whole convent ; and prayers having been offered, he was placed in his chair. Then, according to the usual order, all the Brethren severally came forward, and vowed obedience to the new Prior as their Father. First came the Brethren that had been invested with the order of Canons Regular, then the ‘*Conversi*,’ and afterwards the ‘*Donati*.’ The rest of the day on which these things were done was spent in great joy and thankfulness ; and the presiding Prior, at the conclusion of a paternal exhortation, then bade farewell to all present, and the Brethren returned to their cells. They, however, assembled together again at the sound of the vesper bell, and sang the sacred service with a lively voice.

And now we come to the modest account which Thomas à Kempis gives of his own election to fill the post of Sub-prior again, which had been left vacant by the late election of their Prior, who had previously held the office.

Then three days after the Brethren were again called together in the Chapter-house ; an intimation was given to them by the newly elected Prior, that, according to the statute, they should choose another Sub-prior. Therefore, on the Feast of St. James the Apostle, before the hour of vespers, after a brief scrutiny of the votes had been made, Brother Thomas à Kempis, one of the senior Brethren, now sixty-seven years old, was nominated and elected, who had in times gone by been deputed to this same office. And although he knew himself to be inexperienced and would have excused himself, yet being entreated to yield obedience, he humbly submitted to the decision of the Brethren, and for the sake of Jesus Christ did not decline to undertake

this labour for them ; yet at the same time, ardently beseeching the prayers of his friends and the Brethren, he trusted more to the grace of God than to himself.

Thomas then proceeds to narrate several matters of external interest, some of which much concerned the temporal welfare of the Brethren, and others which affected their neighbours and the country at large. It will only be necessary to give a passing glance at them.

In the same year that Thomas was for the second time made Sub-prior, there was, during the summer season, a great devastation of the standing corn in many places, owing to a plague of mice eating the seed while it was hardly yet ripe. An ingenious contrivance, however, was hit upon by the Brethren for their destruction. Thomas tells us that they made ditches, and placed jars in the earth full of water, and in doing this they displayed so much skill that as many mice were drowned as had in other places destroyed much grain. Nevertheless, the loss occasioned to them and their neighbours in corn, barley, oats, and peas, and other provender that was destined for the animals, was very great.

Then we are informed that, about the middle of the month of September, there was a remarkable tempest, followed by a great inundation of water, breaking in from the entrances to the sea, which overflowed their pasture lands, and spoiled much of the grazing grass. From the same tempest he observes that the ships at sea were exposed to great danger ; several of them were lost and many people drowned. ‘Yet,’ he adds, ‘the compassionate and merciful God provided for our necessities in another way, since our fisherman caught from the flood of waters a great abundance of fish, which sufficed to sustain the Brethren, and those who sought their hospitality, many days.’

Among other details Thomas mentions that, in the year 1449, a number of relics were brought to their monastery from Cologne by Egbert Tyver, an associate. He relates also that their Brother (conventual, not german) Godfrid

Kempis died among the Sisters of the Convent of the Seven Fountains at Brabant.¹ He had formerly been, as will be remembered, at Mount St. Agnes, and had been received by Prior John, Thomas à Kempis's brother. Next year, 1450, a grievous pestilence again broke out in Holland, Utrecht, Zwolle, Campen, Deventer, and Zutphen, and many devout and religious persons were thereby called to their rest. The winter was a very severe one, and much distress prevailed. During Lent, however, and at the beginning of March, our fisherman, Thomas says, caught a large supply of great 'spiringos,' which sustained our Brethren, while the season of fasting lasted, during which time many poor people were begging at the door for food. Mention is made also of a pilgrimage to Rome this year, for the sake of the Indulgences which the Pope granted to those who journeyed thither; but, adds Thomas respecting the multitudes that went thither, 'some returned sound and well, but many more died in the way, and not a few in the city of Rome itself.'

The reception of other Brethren into the Order of Canons Regular at Mount St. Agnes is mentioned from time to time; and so also are the deaths which happened recorded; and among these, about this time, we come upon the name of the venerable Prior of Windesheim, who had formerly been their own Prior at Mount St. Agnes, and one of the senior Brethren of its foundation. This year a new mill was erected for the greater utility of the monastery, and was completed with much labour and cost.

A Kempis records also that, in 1451, a frightful pestilence broke out in Cologne, which carried off 25,000 of the inhabitants. There seems to have been a mission of the Canons Regular of the Windesheim fraternity to Cologne at this time, and it was probably owing to their ardour for a reformation during this great calamity that the House of the Regulars in Cologne, called Corpus Christi, situated in

¹ Thomas tells us shortly afterwards that this convent was wholly destroyed by fire; and that the Sisters were translated to Brussels, through the favour of the Duke of Burgundy.

the parish of St. Christopher, the martyr, was taken over into the Windesheim Brotherhood. After the Day of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Brother Henry Kremer, of Mount St. Agnes, was sent with Brother Gerard Clive ; the one to be the Rector, and the other the Sub-prior, of that House. Thus we see how the influence of those who had probably been trained by Thomas à Kempis, or incited by his example, spread abroad to other places.

In 1452 a lamentable fire happened in the famous city of Amsterdam, by which the greater part of it was destroyed, so that scarce a third portion of it remained uninjured. The Devotees there, and several congregations of the Brothers and Sisters, suffered greatly in this sore judgment of God, since fourteen monasteries were almost entirely destroyed by the fire. Hence great misery ensued in this city, such as had not been known before ; for many virgins, with virgin-like shamefacedness at their destitute condition, might be seen wandering about, wringing their hands and seeking shelter, so that many hearts were moved to tears for them. In other respects also the disaster was very severe and extensive.

In this same year there died on St. Paul's Day at Windesheim, after the hour of vespers, Henry Kremer, mentioned above as having been sent from the Brotherhood at Mount St. Agnes to the House of the Regulars in Cologne, to assist in carrying on the work of reformation. And on the morrow, says Thomas, in the octave of John Baptist, his remains were brought over to our House, where he had lived, by the mercy of God, almost thirty-three years as a 'religious.' For having ended his life at no great distance from our monastery, it was his great desire that he might be buried among his Brethren. He was faithful in the business of writing books, and in frequenting the choir ; he was also a lover of discipline, and kept a guard over his mouth and cell. He had been Prior at Rickenberrich, in Saxony, for almost eleven years. Afterwards he went as a third companion to Diepenene for a few years ; but as he made an urgent appeal that he might return to his Brethren

at Mount St. Agnes, it was granted to him. Afterwards, however, as it has been stated, he was sent to Cologne ; but, for some cause not mentioned, returning to Windesheim, he died there, 'and was buried among us.' I cannot but notice in passing two things ; first, that we have frequent mention of the Brothers at Mount St. Agnes going forth to other places as missionaries, or being employed elsewhere in the work of religious restoration, so that this monastery, as well as others of the Windesheim confraternity, became the centres of a great religious movement, from which the light and life of the Gospel radiated forth. The second point to be observed, is the natural affection which the Brothers bore to the Home of Christian life where Thomas à Kempis dwelt, so that we frequently find a lingering desire in them to come back again once more, after any absence, that they might be refreshed and re-animated with the spiritual and cheering influence of godly concord and fellowship.

In 1453 the chronicler mentions a new epidemic which broke out among them and visited the adjacent towns and villages. The throat became frigid, and a pain fixed itself in the side and breast. It happened to be harvest time, and many of the Brethren were assisting the lay-brothers in the field, when several of them were stricken with pain in the throat, so that they could scarce speak or eat. This arose from an extreme cold north wind that blew, and affected those who exposed themselves too much. The remedy adopted by the Brethren was the use of much warmer clothing, and abstaining from any cold meat and drink ; and by this means most of them, through the mercy of God, were restored to health. Others who neglected themselves were greatly afflicted, and afterwards left very weak. One of the 'Conversi,' Brother Gerard ten Molten, was taken ill with the sickness ; and becoming much worse, he was anointed after compline on St. Martin's Day, and died the following night in great pain. 'He was,' says Thomas, 'a faithful labourer, and always busy doing something for the welfare of the House. He had just completed

his sixtieth year, and had been a "religious" thirty years and three months.'

Among several other records we notice the death of Brother Theodoric Clive, once the third Prior of the monastery, who is mentioned a little before this as having resigned his office on account of increasing infirmities. He was aged and full of days, being seventy-six years old, fifty-five of which he had been a 'religious.' He was one of the four first Brethren, à Kempis reminds us, who were first invested, and who from the beginning of the House had laboured in great poverty, and served God in this very place with the clerics and lay-brethren. Hewas to Thomas a brother beloved in the Lord, with whom he had taken sweet counsel for more than half a century. It had always been his desire, by the favour of God, to end his days among the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes, and to be buried among those who had gone before, which was accordingly done; for he was interred in the east transept by the side of Brother Henry Kremer,¹ whom he had formerly drawn to a religious life, and whom he loved most dearly. And, adds the chronicler, as they loved each other in life, they were not separated in their death and burial. Previous to his death one of those mysterious circumstances happened, which it is impossible to account for. Thomas states that two days before Brother Clive's death, a certain Brother heard a knocking at the door of his cell, which was twice repeated, and going to open the door he could not find or see any one. At this he greatly wondered, and premised that some one was about to die.

In these records may be noticed a few of the changes and events—sometimes untoward and distressing—which broke in upon the otherwise peaceful and uneventful course of life passed by Thomas à Kempis, and for a time would disturb or alter the pious current of his thoughts, however intent upon the duties of his sacred profession. He was

¹ The same person named a little before this, as having been sent on a mission to Cologne, and desiring to be buried at Mount St. Agnes. The name is spelt with a C as well as a K.

not so absorbed in his religious exercises or the employments of his calling, but that he could take an interest in what was passing around him, and concerned the welfare of his fellow-creatures, the which was not confined merely to those of his own community, but extended to the disasters and troubles that affected his countrymen in other parts. During these late years, however, he was actively engaged in the discharge of his duties as Sub-prior, and since these more properly concerned the spiritual estate of the Society, they were in greater accordance with his mind and bent of disposition, and fully engaged his heart and attention. However much he underrated himself and felt his insufficiency for the office he had been called to, his Brethren felt that there were few, if any, better qualified for it. He was now well advanced in years, being upwards of seventy, but having exercised great temperance in his diet, and kept his mind free from distractions, he still preserved the vigour of manhood, while in the meantime his judgment had been matured, his long experience in spiritual matters had become valuable, and the fame of his sanctity and wisdom was so spread abroad, that many persons from afar, as well as near, came and sought to be guided by his counsels. The monastery at Mount St. Agnes received as many as it could hold ; but numbers came from other parts, not only from neighbouring monasteries, but from the towns and villages to visit and consult him. The sick and dying were gladdened by his presence ; the poor and disconsolate were comforted, and the earnest-minded and those newly seeking the way of salvation were guided and strengthened.

Speaking of this period of Thomas à Kempis's life, and his change from being Procurator to that of Sub-prior, his contemporary biographer says of him, ' He brought forth fruit abundantly while in this latter post, by speaking a few words in season, by directing inquiring souls, and admonishing others ; by giving himself to contemplation, and to the exercises of prayer in the Spirit, and to such as flowed from the love of God and His Saints. In consideration whereof

it was indeed an act of kindness in his Brethren to release him from all care concerning outward things.'

Among the writings of Thomas à Kempis a paper was found containing short notes or memorandums respecting some poor and much-tried Brethren. In the familiar names which he gives them he indicates their characters and condition : and that we may in some measure learn his method of dealing with them, and how he would severally cheer them, I here give it, in its simple form, as showing how he loved to condescend to men of low estate, some of whom it is possible, from the accounts given elsewhere by à Kempis, to trace out by name. The paper is headed with these words of Scripture : 'Comfort ye, Comfort ye, My people, saith your God.'¹

To the POOR BROTHER.—Do not be distressed, because thou art not rich.

To the SICKLY BROTHER.—Repine not because thou art weak in body, and art often compassed with infirmities, and hast not that which can delight thee.

To the AFFLICTED LAZARUS.—Rejoice in the Lord, Brother Lazarus, for though now covered with sores, there is prepared for thee an Everlasting rest ; for instead of the poor and scanty fare thou hast had, and the evil thou hast experienced, instead of the brief sorrows thou hast endured in the body, and instead of the crumbs which have been denied thee, thou shalt be feasted at the banquet of the heavenly King, and shalt continually eat the bread of Heaven from the table of Jesus Christ in the kingdom of His Father. Instead of the wounds which have here been inflicted on thee, thou shalt receive a crown of wonderful beauty, adorned with flowers of singular sweetness.

To JOSEPH, THE PILGRIM.—Be joyful, O Brother Joseph ! pure and gentle as thou art ; for though long has been thy pilgrimage in a strange land, where thou hast had no friends to visit thee, no honours or sweet presents offered to thee, still rejoice, because great shall be thy reward in the Heavenly country. For though thou hast had a poor resting-place here, thou shalt be comforted by the Angels, who shall make ready a large and splendid mansion for thee in Heaven, because thou madest choice in this world of an humbler lot and coarser clothing.

¹ Isaiah xl. 1.

To the DESPISED CLAUDUS (so called because he was a cripple).¹
—Leap for joy, O lame Brother, though despised by many because thou art not able to move quickly up and down through the villages and streets of the city with the mighty and the rich, who rejoice in the various delights of the flesh, and suddenly go down into the pit ; abide thou still in secret, and pray incessantly for thyself and others, and give special praise to Christ, Who having withdrawn thee from many occasions of sinning, will show unto thee how to enter the gate of the Kingdom of Heaven through the narrow way.

To SILENT COLUMBANUS.—Break forth with joyful praise, O Brother Columbanus, humble and silent though thou art, without guile and without bitterness. Be thou now obedient unto death, who by denying thyself dost truly carry thy cross, going after Christ. Therefore shalt thou rejoice for ever and ever with all the saints and elect of God ; and shalt not fear to be condemned with the devil to eternal fire.

To the UNLEARNED SIMPLICIANUS.—Sing and praise God, O Brother Simplicianus, since thou hast renounced the wisdom of this world, and hast cast far from thee the fallacies of the devil with his seductions and earthly cares. O give thanks, because thou art found worthy to receive the wisdom of the true Solomon—even our Lord Jesus Christ, in His humility and gentleness. Learn to break thine own will, and to overcome all carnal pleasure : and contend daily against the assaults of the devil, and the wandering of thine heart. Stand fast ; fight right manfully. Do not retreat from the field of battle, and the good company thou art in ; because the Lord thy God is with thee and His angels, before whose Presence every malignant spirit will quickly flee away, like as the smoke driven by the wind.

To the SOLITARY TURTLE-DOVE.—Hear, O mournful one ; attend thou who longest after a solitary life, thou lover of everlasting purity. When thou withdrawest from the tumults of men to pray and to meditate, thou drawest nigh to the celestial choir of angels ; and the assaults of the devils shall give way, together with the images of filthy idols, and all the hurtful monsters of vice that rise up.

And then the following words seem to be said TO ALL in general :—None live so quietly in society, none so cheerfully pass out of this world, as those who are truly obedient, meek, and humble of heart ; who have perfectly, courageously, and without delay renounced their own will, and become subject to God, and

¹ Probably John Tyman, who is mentioned later on, a Conversus.

to men for God's sake. It is a great virtue, it needs great grace to conquer oneself and to die every hour. The fight is hard, but the reward given you will be glorious and eternal, when the victory is consummated.¹

It was, however, with the receiving and training of the younger Brethren, or novices, as they were called, that Thomas à Kempis was more particularly concerned, and in which he was pre-eminently happy. There is an interesting picture given of him, which is said to have been taken from an engraving on copper, found over his grave when his bones were dug up in the burial-ground of Mount St. Agnes.

In this picture Thomas à Kempis is represented as coming forward on the elevated part of the chancel, to receive a young man, anxiously desirous to forsake the world and its vanities and to enter upon a religious state.

The young man is seen approaching the reverend Father, reverently bending his knee and saying :—

O where is peace? for thou its path hast trod.

This is on a scroll which he bears in his hands, and Thomas à Kempis gives the following reply on another scroll which he carries :—

In poverty, retirement, and with God.

Thomas à Kempis had such a modest, gentle, and affectionate manner of addressing those who approached him, yet withal so earnest and after so godly a fashion, that they were deeply impressed with what he said, and were sweetly won over to holy obedience. As a lowly-minded brother in Christ Jesus, yet bearing with him a continual sense of God's presence, he would talk to them of their affairs, the state of their souls, their trials, and their desires after a religious life, and direct them how to act. Sometimes he would do this as he strolled round the grounds of the monastery with them, or when he saw them alone and separately in his cell, or as at other times in the choir, or a quiet corner of the church, when they came to

¹ Opera Omnia T. à K. *Consolatio Pauperum et Infirmorum*, ii. 265, 266.

open their hearts more fully to him, and receive the benefit of absolution together with ghostly counsel and advice to the quieting of their consciences. That we may form some estimate of the character of these hallowed conferences and more private admonitions, we shall here insert a few passages from a small treatise of Thomas à Kempis which is entitled '*Dialogus Novitiorum*,' in which one of the Fathers of the community is represented as talking with a young cleric, on those necessary truths and practices that pertain to the Christian religion. The short preface is so quaint and explanatory that it should not be passed over. Commencing with the verse, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost,'¹ à Kempis says:—

This is the word of Christ to His disciples. For when the Almighty and most Merciful Lord had satisfied five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes, He commanded the remainder of the fragments to be collected, that they should not be wasted. Now, to speak mystically, the fragments of food may be understood to be the sayings of the wise, and the examples of the godly, which ought frequently to be pondered upon by devout Brethren, to be diligently noted and treasured up in books or tablets, as if gathered into a basket, for the sake of reading. And being induced by this consideration, I have, for the incitement of novices, resolved by the help of God to insert in this little work the counsels and examples of some of my predecessors; so that by hearing these good words the Most High God, from Whom all good things proceed, may be praised, and that many reading what is said herein, may be the more inflamed to a contempt of the world.

Thomas à Kempis makes use—as he humbly intimates, and as he has been represented as occasionally doing—of the instructions of those who had gone before him; still there is much of his own godly thoughts mingled with what he says, and since all comes from his pen, and fairly expresses the sort of intercourse he held with the younger members of the community, it forms a most important part of his life's work.

After commending devout conferences between godly persons, the walking with God in a religious life is set

¹ St. John vi. 12.

forth. The colloquy is opened by a Novice coming to him after the manner depicted in the picture just mentioned, and asking for spiritual counsel.

I entreat thee (he says), most beloved Father, that, for the love of Jesus Christ, thou wouldest have an attentive regard to me, that thou wouldest teach me such things that be needful for my saving health, that thou wouldest sternly correct my excesses, seasonably apply remedies to dispel my passions ; and if thou knowest of any good examples thou wouldest propose them for my imitation. For to this end I have forsaken the world, and the things of the world, that in a religious state I may learn and do more fully the will of God, that I may live more securely from the perils of temptations, and that finally, when the race of life is ended, I may obtain the reward of Eternal blessedness with the faithful in Christ. For I purpose for the future to devote my whole life to the service of God, and to finish the small remainder of the time that is left me in the exercises of religion. Wherefore I am ready to undergo every labour, and to acquiesce in your admonitions, as also in the ordinances of the elders, for the furtherance and perfecting of my salvation, as becomes a Novice, and as the state of the religious require.

Then the reverend Father thus addresses him :—

Gladly do I listen to what you say, and if I can be of any service, I will do what you ask. May the grace of the Holy Spirit be now present with me, that I may speak worthily, and that our intercourse may be pleasing to God, and profitable to our neighbours. I long indeed to converse with you on the things of God, and about the servants of God ; so that by such conference you may be more abundantly satisfied, and I may be refreshed. I trust also in the Lord Jesus that His compassion will not be wanting to us who now call upon Him ; since He has graciously promised His presence to those who speak together concerning Himself, saying, ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.’

Hence it was, that when two of His disciples were walking together in the way and talking concerning Him, He appeared unto them under the garb of a stranger, and said, ‘What manner of communications are these, which ye have one with the other as ye walk and are sad?’ And they said, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth.’ Behold after what manner the gracious Lord personally meets with those who are sad for His sake.

And because they were not discoursing of worldly matters, but of the facts relating to our Saviour, therefore were they deservedly consoled by Him, and instructed likewise in the Sacred Scriptures. And presently we find that they are so vehemently inflamed with the love of Christ, that being wonderfully enlightened by His sweet discourse, they said, 'Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?'

For as good discourses kindle the hearts of the pious with the love of heavenly things, and cause the works of virtue to fructify, so vain discourses corrupt good manners, cause men to lose the grace of God, extinguish devotion, defile the conscience, and become a stumbling-block to others. Therefore let us pray God that He may lift up the light of His countenance upon us, and keep us from every evil work and every idle word. Let us now sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus, to hear His word, which is able to save our souls; and in all our actions let it be our endeavour to please God.

The Novice. You have comforted and instructed me with the best of words and examples. Would to God I could keep my ways, so that I might not offend with my tongue! Would to God that all my ways were made so direct, as if they were always done in the sight of my God! But that I be not tedious to you, tell me, I pray you, how any one can arrive at a perfect contempt of the world, and become a true disciple of Christ? ¹

For I see that there are many that renounce the world, and yet afterwards return to a secular life. Others also, I observe, assume the religious habit, but gradually languish from their first fervour.

They go to church with others, but they taste not the grace of devotion. Some also who have been drawn to an interior life have gone back to external things, and have little by little fallen into licentious habits. I beseech you, therefore, that you will not suffer me to wander out of the way of perfection, but clearly teach me what I must avoid, and to what I must hold fast.

The Father. A good disciple is ready to acquiesce in the counsels of his master; nor will he presume rashly to do anything contrary to his judgment. Thus he preserves humility, fulfils obedience, obtains grace, secures peace, guards his conscience, and gains for himself a good name. For he that yieldeth his ear to wisdom and doctrine at the beginning, will not easily go astray;

¹ This is, in short, the subject of the first chapter of the *De Imitatione Christi*, and always forms a leading theme of teaching with à Kempis.

but, after passing through a brief season of labour, shall rejoice in a blessed end.

And so much the greater will be his proficiency in all godly virtue, and so much the wiser will he become, the more humbly he submits to his superiors. For the tree which is to grow upwards, must send its roots downwards, that it fall not. Therefore be not at any time dismayed with sudden fear, but put a firm trust in God : relinquish thine own will, and subject thyself in true humility. The Lord will be at thy side, even He Who protecteth such as walk in simplicity, and Who revealeth His secrets to the humble ones.

But that you may the better persevere in the good way, take the example of those who have adopted the better way of life, and from the learned search out wisdom, from the experienced seek counsel, and with the devout hold discourse. But if you see any wandering from the way of truth, and going back after Satan, do not imitate them; for they are of those that perish ; but study always to emulate those who are good and fervent.

Seek to be saved with the few, who enter into Life through the straight gate. For Christ testifies that the way is broad and spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many that go in thereat. Woe unto them that depart from the Lord God, and go back into Egypt, that is, into the world, which is darkened by sin, that they may pamper their flesh, which is soon to perish. But blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and who meditates in His laws day and night, that he may walk in His ways.

Moreover, our gracious Lord does not forsake those who are His ; but even like a good Shepherd, He comforteth His sheep, who hear His voice, and who follow Him even unto death ; choosing rather to die in the battle of temptation than to consent to sin, or shamefully turn back again to the world. To such He says, ' Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' Why fear then to live under such a Shepherd, and to fight for the Eternal Kingdom, which He has promised to give you ? for what He has promised He will indeed fulfil.

Nor is it future joys alone that He has promised to give to those who despise the world, but even in this present life He gives to them that serve Him the consolation of the Holy Ghost, which is far better and sweeter than all the mirth of the world. For oftentimes He infuses His grace of devotion into those who pray ; and to those who meditate on the law of God, he opens the light of understanding ; that the sweetness of the Spirit being once

tasted, the flesh and the world may become more vile. Whence to them who perfectly renounce a worldly life the Lord saith, 'Every one who forsaketh house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or friends, for My Name's sake shall receive an hundred-fold, and possess Eternal Life.' ¹

But, because there are many that seek after vain consolations, and turn their whole attention to exterior things, therefore do they not inwardly feel the grace of devotion, nor are they worthy to receive the heavenly illumination. The safest state, then, wherein to please God, and to be more worthy of greater grace and glory, is to shun the world ; to leave friends ; to despise temporal things ; to take up a stricter life ; to renounce one's own things ; to live under obedience ; to persevere in labours ; to mortify the flesh with watching and fasting ; to give one's self to reading and prayer ; to contend daily against temptations and vices ; to loathe things present ; to long after those that are Eternal ; to seek instantly the grace of God, and having found it, to keep it with all diligence ; to think meanly of one's self ; gladly to expend our attentions upon others ; to wish to please God only ; to endeavour to converse freely with Brethren without being querulous ; and firmly to persevere in a holy purpose, and in the earnest desire of advancing to perfection.

These are the things that belong to a true disciple of Christ ; these lead the servant of God most certainly to the heavenly kingdom. Wherefore our gracious Master saith to His disciples : 'Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations ; and I appoint unto you a kingdom, even as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.' ²

Portions of the counsel just given partake of those ascetic views of the world which are very repulsive to the feelings of many religious people in these days. I am prepared to admit that there is something that appears unnecessarily harsh in what is said, and belongs to a system or condition of life which is not necessarily incumbent upon all Christians alike, since God has ordained the world for our use, and all that is in it, and has given us all things richly to enjoy ; yea even corn, and oil, and wine, to make glad the heart of man ; and we should receive and take delight in His blessings, and render thanks to

¹ St. Matt. xix. 29.

² St. Luke xxii. 28, 29, 30.

Him with grateful hearts for all His goodness ; neither does He design to take us out of the world, but to keep us from the evil thereof ; for it is His will that Christians should be as salt in the land, to witness against sin, to witness for Christ, to keep the world from becoming utterly corrupt. But, on the other hand, we must not lose sight of the truth which is contained in what à Kempis says, and which he attempts to grasp with all his might, and the acceptance of which he urges in all its naked sternness, though it is so feebly held by many professing Christians in our times, and that is, that a worldly spirit is not only undesirable, but inconsistent, at variance with, and destructive of, the spiritual life ; that the life of God in the soul of any man cannot be maintained where the world reigns and has possession of the heart. And everyone must choose between God and the world—the two cannot reign in the same heart. It is undesirable to enter more deeply into this important point at this time, but let the reader remember what St. John says, ‘ If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.’ And what St. Paul saith, ‘ If ye live after the flesh ye shall die ; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.’ And above all what Christ saith, ‘ Ye cannot serve God and mammon ; ’ it must be one or the other ; and à Kempis desires that there should be no mistake about it—no trifling with the matter, but that a broad, distinct, and certain line should be drawn, as to Whose we are and Whom we serve ; and this leads him in his zeal at times to present religion in a forbidding aspect, beyond what is required, and seemingly to make life needlessly oppressive and cheerless. But to return to the dialogue.

Novice. I am greatly pleased and comforted in the Lord by what you have said. And I would earnestly beg of your clemency that you would confirm my wavering soul with the sacred Scriptures, and if thou knowest of any good examples, thou wouldst freely acquaint me with them. Nevertheless I am desirous in the first place to be instructed concerning the causes that hinder spiritual progress, that I may be able to avoid the snares of the

enemy, and safely tread the path of the just with an unoffending foot.

Father. The state of the religious is great and holy if it be well kept, if everyone lives according as the rule teaches and the habit implies ; but no Brother is so secure but that he may fall, and scarcely can he be regarded as a spiritual person simply because he walks with good men, frequently listens to sacred lessons, and sings well, but because he endeavours with his whole heart to fulfil that which he has promised, and do that which he ought.

But if at any time he fails through infirmity, or is overcome by any temptation, or moved with evil passion, let him at once study to correct himself ; let him grieve greatly, acknowledge his guilt, and not venture to excuse his fault ; but in craving pardon let him voluntarily humble himself, that God may forgive him. For the gracious Lord, although He be offended and slighted, is soon appeased by the tears and prayers of those who confess their sins, as the holy David witnesseth when he was penitent, ‘A contrite and humble heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.’

With great strength of soul, then, stretch forth thyself to the interior life ; and forgetting those things that are behind, and the things of this world, do not look for a pattern to those who are remiss in their duties, and infirm of purpose ; but attend to what thou camest for, and to what thou oughtest to do. For he who wishes to make progress ought to begin afresh every day, and neither shun any labour, nor suffer any time to pass idly away. Do not then count the length of days or the number of years thou hast spent in religion ; neither glory in the dignity of thine Order, nor in the agreeableness of a delightful place ; but ponder well how far thou art still distant from true virtue, and diligently examine in what superfluity of naughtiness thou still liest. For if any man think himself to be something, he deceiveth himself ; since by haughtiness of mind the grace of Christ is lost, and the good things which have been long sought for are quickly carried away.

So long as thou art in the body of sin thou must not promise to thyself any security from temptations, or presume to rest from labours ; but as a valiant soldier contend against all wickedness : and, until thou receive the crown of glory, hold most firmly to thine heart the shield of patience, in every temptation and tribulation ; that with the Apostle Paul thou mayest say in the hour of death, ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I

have kept the faith ; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the righteous Judge shall give me.'

Put on, therefore, the armour of God, and stand ready for the battle ; since there are many that war against thee—the flesh, the world, and the devil ; who do not cease night or day to assail the innocent, and those who willingly serve the Lord. But do not thou be afraid of them, neither listen to them, nor yield to them ; nor do thou consent to their suggestions, however fair and plausible they be ; for they speak to thee treacherously, that they may catch and entrap thee, that they may both keep thee at a distance from God, and finally lead thee into all evil.

Watch thou, therefore, in prayer, and daily humbly supplicate Divine help against the snares of the Devil ; and follow the counsel of experienced Brethren, lest the temptation get the dominion over thee, and the world again allure and entangle thee. Have thou then in mind that which is read in the Apocalypse for the consolation of the soldiers of Christ fighting in the world : ' Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and I will give him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.'¹

I shall not continue the intercourse between these two any further, but conclude with one or two of the anecdotes which à Kempis gives to encourage his young friend to embrace a religious life. The first is this :—' There was among us,' he says, ' a certain priest, named Alardus, who desired to renounce the world, and take the habit of the Canons Regular. But before he was invested it was necessary that he should be proved, whether he could give up the delicacies he formerly enjoyed in the world, and to which he had for a long time been prodigiously accustomed ; and because he must give up his parents and friends, and must live as it were a desolate life far away from his country, he began to be exceedingly sad. This distress of mind moreover increased ; for not a few other grievances followed, as if they were unendurable. For the enemy maliciously suggested to him how wearisome he would find the place, and how difficult the rules of the Order ; and how well he might live in his own neighbourhood, and profit quite as much among many friends. For

¹ Rev. ii. 7, and iii 12. *Dialogus Novitiorum*, ch. iii.

these were the darts of the treacherous serpent, by which he endeavours to wound the hearts of novices, so that he may compel them to withdraw from a holy resolution. But God had mercy on him ; for whilst he was yet in the keenest part of the struggle the light of heavenly consolation dawned upon him, and the whole cloud of earthly sadness was dispelled. Therefore being again animated and encouraged by the Spirit of God against diabolical insinuations, he began to think within himself for what he had come, and wisely considering the resolution he had already entered upon, he, with a manly spirit, roused himself up, saying to himself: "Behold by the providence of God, thou hast voluntarily and submissively entered this place for the sake of amending thy life, and now thou hast found what is much more necessary for thee than what thou hast a while ago relinquished in the world. Thou hast given up a few friends for Christ's sake, but for these carnal associations thou hast already obtained many more spiritual brethren who are united to thee by a larger affection. All things which are for the use of the monastery are thine, and will be shared with thee in love. Others labour for thee, others pray for thee, others read for thee, others write ; no one here lives in idleness, no one possesses anything for himself ; all things are held in common. What then hast thou to complain of, or what to fear, but to serve God with a willing heart? Subject thyself then to the most sweet yoke of Christ, bear the yoke of the Lord laid upon thee, forget thine own people and thy father's house, and thou shalt receive great things instead of these little ones—eternal things instead of temporal—the most glorious kingdom of heaven instead of the vanities of this world : so that like St. Paul thou canst say, As having nothing of one's own, and yet possessing all things in common." Thus pondering over these and similar thoughts, and considering the footsteps of the holy Fathers for many days, the mind of the priest was much comforted. And after a time of probation he was invested with the habit of Canons Regular ; and

having completed a year he made his solemn profession. After this he lived in the Order most worthily for thirty years, and died in peace at a good old age.’¹

The other anecdote is shorter, but very apposite. ‘There was a certain rich and worldly-minded matron, that had an only son, whom she loved most dearly, who had come to man’s estate, was well informed, and adorned with many accomplishments. Being endued with heavenly inspiration, he chose rather to serve God humbly than to enjoy himself, or trade in the world with his paternal possessions. He therefore departed to a long distance from his friends, and sought the monastery of the Canons Regular, giving up all earthly ties that he might the more secretly and perfectly belong to the family of the Lord. His widowed mother followed him, and endeavoured to recall him with many entreaties and tears, but could not in the least prevail.

‘She then departed to her own home, and continued in the deepest grief, until a most unfortunate circumstance happened in the same city where she dwelt. The son of a certain rich and influential man was maliciously wounded by another, and was taken up dead. Hearing this, the matron examined the bearing of the matter, and at length turning her thoughts back to herself, and becoming aware of the dangers abroad, moderated her grief, and considered within herself, saying, How fortunately it has happened for thee that thou didst not hear this of thy son; and that thou needest not fear for him concerning other matters! Is it not safer that he should serve God in the monastery than that he should perish in the world with thee? And from that day forward, being converted to the good-will of God, she gave hearty thanks, and no longer lamented as if she had lost her son, but rejoiced greatly at his conversion; she had a special love for the Canons Regular, and often hospitably entertained them. And this was told me,’ à Kempis adds, ‘at her own table.’²

¹ *Dialogus Novitiorum*, ch. v.

² ‘Et hoc mihi in mensa sua recitavit.’ *Dialogus Novit.*, ch. vii.

From this last expression it is conjectured either that this matron must have been the generous benefactress who kindly received à Kempis into her house at Deventer, or that à Kempis on some occasions would be entertained out of the monastery where he lived. This may seem inconsistent with conventual rules, and contrary to the inclinations of à Kempis, but it must be remembered that these monasteries of the Brothers of Common Life were carried on somewhat differently from others, and that as a Father of the community Thomas would have more liberty and might associate with the godly that lived outside, in order that he might do them good. Occasions like this would be rare, but an imitator of Christ would not refuse such kindnesses when a special opportunity of usefulness called for its acceptance.

But considering the main business which occupied à Kempis at this period of his life, and the many years he was thus engaged as the instructor of novices, it is difficult to estimate fully the value of his sacred labours, and the number of young men he came in contact with, and was the means of inciting and encouraging to holiness of life, and devotion to the service of their Lord and Master. I shall have occasion to refer to other ministerial duties which he undertook, but I must for awhile draw the reader's attention to what was going on in the Church during this period, before I again revert to the simple annals which Thomas kept of what transpired in the devout household where he dwelt.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A brief outline of Church history during the first half of the life of à Kempis—The papal schism—Its origin—The great disorder and bitter contention occasioned—The difficulties of dealing with the rival Popes—The reformation of the Church designed—The Council of Pisa—The deposition of Popes, and another elected—Greater confusion than ever—The Council of Constance—Three Popes deposed, and a fourth elected—The reforms of the Church frustrated—Wickliff's bones ordered to be exhumed—Huss and Jerome of Prague burnt at the stake—The just indignation of the Bohemians—Their struggle for religious liberty—The deadly warfare that ensued.

IN the previous chapter some mention was made relative to the venerable Prior of the mother-House of the Canons Regular of the Brothers of Common Life at Windesheim attending the great Council of Constance, along with the Prior of Zwolle; and as both places were close to where Thomas à Kempis lived, and both individuals were intimately acquainted with him, and held him in high esteem, it seems very probable that he and the Brethren were cognisant of and took a deep interest in, what was passing in the wider circle of the Church at large, outside the little circle in which he moved and where his pious devotion was highly valued. It is time, therefore, that some notice should be taken of the various historical changes and circumstances of moment that happened, and that a succinct and cursory view should be given of them to enable the reader to keep in mind the character of the times in which à Kempis lived, and which in some degree probably affected the tenor of his life, and the aspect of his religion.

From about the time of the birth of Thomas à Kempis till the time when he had been about twenty-five years in the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes, the great papal schism had continued to vex, perplex, and distress the Church;

and was not only a great hindrance to the progress of true religion, but a scandal and grievous injury. 'This dissension,' says Mosheim, 'was fomented with such dreadful success, and arose to such a shameful height, that, for the space of fifty years, the Church had two or three different heads at the same time; each of the contending Popes forming plots, and thundering out anathemas against their competitors. The distress and calamity of these times are beyond all power of description; for, not to insist upon the perpetual contentions and wars between the factions of the several Popes, by which multitudes lost their fortunes and their lives, all sense of religion was extinguished in most places, and profligacy arose to a most scandalous excess. The clergy, while they vehemently contended which of the reigning Popes ought to be deemed the true successor of Christ, were so excessively corrupt as to be no longer studious to keep up even an appearance of religion or decency.'¹ Seventy years previous to the outburst of the schism, the Popes, being for the most part Frenchmen, had habitually absented themselves from Rome, the seat of pontifical authority, and had taken up their abode, held their court, and dispensed their favours at Avignon in France. Here, while profligacy was suffered to reign and have free license, tyrannous exactions were multiplied, and the real spiritual interests of the Church were grossly neglected.

The continued absence of the Popes from Rome was increasingly felt by its citizens to be very detrimental, not only to their spiritual but temporal interests, and became a sore grievance to them. Upon the death of Gregory XI., therefore, at the beginning of 1378, the leading inhabitants of Rome resolved to make a vigorous effort to have a Roman elected as Pope. They were not altogether successful, but the Cardinals, greatly terrified by the threats of the populace, in haste elected a Neapolitan, who became Pope under the title of Urban VI. And as he was not a Frenchman the Romans were content to accept

¹ *Ecccl. Hist. Cent. XIV. iii. 327, 328.*

him, and all seemed to promise well. Urban began at once to put down abuses and enforce ecclesiastical discipline; this, however, so incensed most of the Cardinals and put a stop to their iniquities, that they secretly departed; and by cunning stratagem, gaining the countenance of some other Cardinals, they elected another person—the Cardinal of Geneva—to be Pope, who assumed the authority of the papal chair under the name of Clement VII.

While Urban still continued at Rome, Clement took up his abode at Avignon. France, Spain, and Scotland, with a few lesser powers, acknowledged Clement. England, Italy, and Germany, with the rest of Europe, in the main espoused the cause of Urban. The latter in the wrath of his offended dignity denounced his rival as Antichrist, and cursed those who supported his cause. His anger and cruelty seemed to know no bounds. He deposed and excommunicated several Bishops and Cardinals, and elected others in their places who favoured the interests of Rome. Six of the Cardinals the most learned, and of good repute, whom he suspected of treachery, he inveigled to Rome, under the pretence of holding a consistory, and having had them seized, he loaded them with chains and cast them into a close and fetid dungeon. They were afterwards put to the torture; and an unwilling witness describes the horrible sufferings of two of them, one of whom was stripped almost naked and hoisted up by the pulley, while the Pope's nephew was standing by, laughing at his agonies. Thrice was this done to him. Another was racked with even worse cruelty, but his only cry was, 'Christ has suffered for us.' Other barbarities of Urban are recorded, but we cannot even glance at them. Many of the princes and nobles of France and other parts he pronounced guilty of apostasy, and absolved their subjects from their allegiance.

Clement, though indifferently supported by those who espoused his cause, was not backward in hurling back his bulls and anathemas, and stirring up opposition and war against his rival, whom he also denounced as Antichrist. The animosity and strife, the treachery and sufferings that

arose through this bitter schism, can be more easily imagined than described. In 1389, a little before à Kempis entered the monastery of St. Agnes, Urban died at Rome ; and then sanguine hopes were entertained that an end would soon be put to the schism. The Italian Cardinals, however, without delay elected another Neapolitan as Pope in the place of Urban, who took the title of Boniface IX., and thus the religious feud was only perpetuated. And, woeful as the state of things had sunk to, they became only worse. The ignorance of the new Pope is said to have been surpassed only by his avarice. His sale of livings and of indulgences became notorious. Corruption, abuses, and profligacy grew apace, great dishonour was brought upon religion, and the Church and its offices sunk into greater contempt.

The outlook was dark indeed. And yet, besides those pious and devout men like Thomas à Kempis, Florentius, Huesden, and other Brothers of Common Life, who kept aloof from the sad disorders that prevailed, and endeavoured to set an example of real Christian life, there were several wise, learned, and virtuous men, holding high position in the Church, who deeply mourned over the depravity of the times, the unceasing strife, and deadly animosities which existed, and anxiously laboured, not only to compose the difference and heal the breach, but to find a remedy for the monstrous evils which so greatly oppressed the Church. Hence a council was in the first instance called at Pisa. And singularly enough, when matters were somewhat forwarded, a way to reunion seemed at once opened out by the death of Clement VII. At the request of the University of Paris the King sent a special message to the Cardinals at Avignon, not to proceed to the election of any other person in the place of Clement. When the King's envoy arrived, the Cardinals were sitting in conclave, but the election had not been made ; they now, however, hastened to conclude it, unwilling to yield anything for the sake of peace ; and choosing to risk the wrath of the King, they chose Peter Luna, Cardinal of Arragon, to be Pope, but with this proviso, that he must yield up the dignity to which they

had promoted him, if it were deemed necessary at the forthcoming Council.

The title that Peter assumed was that of Benedict XIII. He was a man of great ability, but insincere. At first he seemed to show an earnest desire to bring the schism to a close, but eventually he put every obstacle in the way of the Council meeting for this purpose. After many vain attempts to gain his consent, the Court and University of Paris determined on their side, not only to proceed without him, but, lest he should frustrate their long-cherished design, as he evidently intended, they went to the extreme length of solemnly withdrawing the obedience of the whole nation from him. Four years did Benedict intrench himself in his palace at Avignon, the Cardinals having withdrawn from him in a body, and the very domestics and chaplains retiring from his service.

Afterwards by degrees the nation returned to their subjection, fearing lest the rival Pope at Rome should, without their consent, gain supreme power. For the other side were not one whit disposed to make any concession in hope of bringing about a reconciliation. When Boniface died, the Roman Cardinals promptly elected a successor, under the name of Innocent VII., who exhibited much feebleness of character, and was as insincere as his rival. Thus the schism was kept open. In two years, however, Innocent died, and the Cardinals, finding that a strong feeling prevailed throughout Europe against the dominancy of the papacy, and that some resolute measure would be taken to put an end to the schism and the abuses that existed, bound themselves with an oath that whosoever of them was elected Pope should be ready to resign the Holy Office, if called upon to do so by the united voice of the two Colleges of Cardinals, and of the Church assembled in council. They then elected one whom they thought well fitted to fill the Papal See, an aged, and, as it was thought, a pious ecclesiastic, who assumed the name of Gregory XII.

The General Council, that had been so long looked for, at last met at Pisa in 1409. There had been much preliminary

intercourse with, and prevarication by, the two rival Popes, each of them being willing to support the Council provided that he alone should remain in the papal chair. The Council finding that neither of the Popes would submit, though both had been elected subject to the decision of the assembled Church, proceeded to depose both of them ; and, still asserting the undivided authority of the papacy, they resolved upon the election of another individual to fill the Holy See. The discussions were prolonged, and the excitement became intense. The Cardinals as one body then entered into conclave, having promised to continue the Council after the election for the purpose of instituting a general reformation in the Church. After six days' deliberation their choice fell upon the Cardinal of Milan, who received the title of Alexander V.

This Pope, however, having little strength of character speedily fell under the influence of Balthazar Cossa, the Legate of Bologna, who took a prominent part in the affairs of the Council. After a short reign of little more than ten months Alexander died at Bologna ; some say that he was poisoned.

Now though this Pope did not live long, and could not be charged with being avaricious, he nevertheless did one thing which greatly affected the peace and interests of the Church ; and this was, in his giving a power into the hands of the Mendicant Friars, to which Order he had belonged, which created a widespread, long-continued, and very disastrous confusion ; causing much bitterness and dissension, which was felt more or less in every diocese and parish throughout Europe. What he did was to make the Mendicant Friars independent of the bishop or of any other authority wherever they were, and responsible to himself alone, or to those he appointed over them. No parish priest, no bishop could interfere with them, or say them nay. Hitherto no friar could even receive confession from anyone without permission from the parish priest or the bishop ; now they might preach where they liked, and as they liked ; they could hear confessions and grant absolution

in spite of the duly recognised local authority. Thus at one stroke during his brief rule he created another species of schism in the Church, which was to outlast the other.

Henceforth there were to be two separate interests—two separate bodies of men in every division and corner of the Church, both indeed looking up to the Pope and submitting to his dictations, but both at strife with each other, and contending in nearly every parish ‘for the love, obedience, and liberality of the flock.’ This crafty movement placed a great power in the hands of the reigning Pontiff; since he could at any time play off one party against the other, and counteract the designs or oppositions of either against himself or the interests of the Papal See. But the frightful jealousies, disorders, and contentions which it engendered no pen can describe. The state of affairs became most lamentably worse.

Meanwhile the Council had adjourned for three years; and, on the death of Alexander, Balthazar had been elected by the Cardinals, who had become entirely subservient to him. He took the name of John XXIII. This was an unfortunate choice; for though a man of vigour, capacity, and influence, he was utterly unscrupulous and frightfully immoral.¹ At first, however, like his predecessors he gave

¹ Milman says: ‘Balthazar Cossa, if hardly surpassed in extortion and cruelty by the famous Eccelino, by his debaucheries might have put to shame the most shameless of the Viscontis. Under his iron rule day after day such multitudes of persons of both sexes, strangers as well as Bolognese, were put to death on charges of treason, sedition, and other crimes, that the population of Bologna seemed dwindling down to that of a small city. He used to send to the executioners to dispatch their victims with greater celerity. Neither person nor possession was exempt from his remorseless taxation. Grain could not be ground, nor bread made, nor wine sold, without his license. From all ranks, from the noble to the peasant, he exacted the most laborious services. He laid taxes on prostitutes, gaming-houses, usurers. His licentiousness was even more wide and promiscuous. Two hundred maids, wives, and widows, with many nuns, are set down as victims of his lust. Many were put to death by their jealous and indignant husbands and kindred. The historian wonders that in so rich and populous a city no husband’s, or father’s, or brother’s dagger found its way to the heart of the tyrant.’—Th. à Niem., apud *Eccard.*, p. 1537; *Lat. Christ.*, book xiii. ch. v.

It is only fair to add that Sismondi (*Rep. Ital.* ch. lxii.) thinks that he was not quite so abandoned as he is represented to be by some authors, or he

the hope of better things, but afterwards when he felt himself somewhat secure, he caused, as might have been expected, much grievous disappointment. The calling of the Council was deferred ; the dissatisfaction of the ruling powers, and of some most eminent men, however, was so great, that after some further delay another Council of the Church assembled at Constance. It was opened by John the Pope, and was attended by the leading ecclesiastics of Europe, by many eminent laymen, and by the ambassadors from the several Courts.¹

It might be supposed from the decision of the Council of Pisa that the schism which arose from there being two rival Popes had become extinct. But no such thing. So unsettled were the politics of European Rulers, and so eager were they severally to gain a sanction for their ambitious designs, that if they could not gain the countenance of the last-elected Pope, they sought to obtain it from one or other of those who, though deposed, still claimed to be Popes, and found it an easy matter, when on their part they promised to support the interest of the one they appealed to. The result of these proceedings was only to multiply confusion, distrust, animosity, and bloodshed. Instead of two Popes there were now three, viz. Gregory XII., Benedict XIII., and John XXIII., all claiming the obedience of the faithful, all exacting tribute and imposts wherever they could be levied, all contending with deadly hatred against those who opposed them, and fulminating their anathemas.

In this terrible state of affairs the Emperor Sigismund would scarcely have been raised to the pontificate. Allowing, however, that he was not so bad as stated by his own secretary, there is no question about his life being deeply stained with many vices ; the question is only one of degree. Having been engaged in the service of piratical warfare in early life, he retained the singular habit of devoting the night to business and the day to sleep.

¹ The importance of this Council may be estimated from the statement which affirms that the entire number of clergy present, though perhaps not all at one time, amounted to eighteen thousand. Among them were four Patriarchs, twenty-nine Cardinals, thirty-three Archbishops, about one hundred and fifty Bishops, one hundred and thirty Abbots, and two hundred and fifty Doctors.

brought his powerful influence to bear; and in combination with the representatives of some of the other Courts of Europe, and several distinguished ecclesiastics, determined to use more effectual means to put an end to this grievous schism. Soon after the Council met, some very resolute measures were proposed. The Legates of both Gregory and Benedict presented themselves before the Council; but when the representatives of the former saw how useless it would be to oppose the resolutions of the assembly, they proposed in the name of their masters each to cede his authority provided the other two would. Hot and protracted discussions ensued. The Council of Constance ratified what had been done at Pisa, and in doing this seemed to sanction the election of John; but as a strong feeling prevailed that he had not kept faith with the Church, that his election stood in the way of unity and reform, but more especially because many serious charges were brought against him—not only of avarice but of other shameful crimes—the Council were desirous of getting rid of him also. Finding that he could never be able to stand against the storm, he resigned also, but upon the condition that the other two should not retain their authority. Benedict was now the only difficulty. He positively refused to abdicate, and being the only remaining Pope, he resolved to use his authority in spite of the Council, and claim the obedience of the faithful.

The conflict became very serious, and anxious fears were entertained as to the issue. The Emperor of Germany and the other sovereigns of Europe, together with the leading ecclesiastics of the day, were kept at bay by the subtle cunning and obstinacy of the aged Benedict. Having few, however, that supported his cause, he withdrew to a strong fortress near the mouth of the Ebro, with a few followers who still clung to him. The Council of Constance again deposed him. But though now twice deposed, and deserted by all the secular and ecclesiastical powers, the perfidious old man still held the mockery of a pontifical court, and daily launched his anathemas against his various

adversaries. And for ten more years did he keep up the antagonism, returning with interest the excommunications of those who rejected him.

The Council of Constance having now cleared the way by the deposition of the three Popes, proposed to elect another, but at the same time to bind him over to carry out the reformation of the Church, which was much desired. Otho Colonna, a Roman noble, was selected by the united College of Cardinals (thirty-six in number), who was elevated to the papal chair under the name of Martin V. What made his election the more secure was, that it was confirmed by the representatives of the five great nations of Europe most interested in the matter. The Emperor Sigismond was the first to prostrate himself at his feet with every expression of joy and thankfulness. The ex-Pope John also, who had been imprisoned on account of his crimes, having escaped by bribing his guards, now sought reconciliation with Martin, and with deep abasement at his footstool, acknowledged him as Supreme Pontiff before a full court.

Thus, though the schism was in some degree kept open while Benedict lived, it was now virtually ended. Previously to this, the necessity for correcting the many serious abuses that oppressed the Church had not been lost sight of, but was earnestly demanded. A Committee of Reform was appointed to examine into the whole catalogue of abuses, and to submit to the Council a general scheme for redressing them. For more than two years did this commission sit, until members of the Council became weary of waiting, and loudly called for their report and advice. They had nearly completed their work, and had made many wise and salutary regulations for the future welfare of the Church, when a new controversy arose among them, the issue of which was most momentous. It was this,—should these reforms be carried out before the election of a new Pope, or should they, having been decreed by the Council, be left to be carried out by the Pope, when he had been duly appointed, who, with his Court, should act as the executive of the Council when it was dissolved?

The discussion ran high, but ultimately it was decided, to the great distress of the Emperor of Germany and many earnest-minded men, that a Pope should first be elected. For it was contended that without a Pope the Church was as a headless trunk, which was the greatest of all deformities, and that therefore the first step must be to restore the head. This then was an attempt to carry out the reforms on the line of maintaining the papal system. Loud had been the denunciations of the iniquities of the Popes, and of the profligacy that reigned in every part; very urgent and thoroughly honest were the members of the Council in their endeavours, and in the measures they proposed, to restore health and purity to the Church; and past experience should have taught them that the upholding of the papacy itself lay at the root of the evil which was rampant, and that they must not expect peace, or freedom from tyrannous exactions and corruptions, whilst its authority was supreme, or at least till it had been effectually and permanently put into subjection to the Church herself in council. The strenuous resistance that was made to the election of a Pope before a reformation had been effected showed how little confidence or hope prevailed in the system to which they were wedded, and which they thought so necessary, if not essential, to the unity of the Church. The representatives of the Church of England led by the noble-hearted and wise Robert Hallam, Bishop of Salisbury, and the German ecclesiastics resolutely supported by their Emperor, long maintained an opposition to the election of the Pope first, before the reforms had been made.

After much delay a strong remonstrance was made to the Emperor, that great danger would arise if the Cardinals did not proceed to an election. The matter was pressed forward again and again. In the meantime, alas! Robert of Salisbury, a staunch reformer, was taken ill and died, and a short while after the English party wavered, and then went over to the papal party. It was a great crisis. The German party, among whom were the two Priors of the

Brothers of Common Life, still held resolutely to having the reforms made first, and presented a fresh memorial to the Council very forcibly showing, and with reason, 'that the General Council stood in the place of the Church and completely represented it; that the schism had arisen from the general corruption of that body, and that such corruption could only be remedied during the vacancy of the See; that if a Pope were once elected—however virtuous or upright the individual exalted might be, however proved, and old in integrity and piety—he would speedily be stained by the vices which infected the chair, and debased by the ecclesiastics surrounding it; that he would grope in the darkness and solitude of his own honesty, till his private excellence would give way before the overwhelming depravities of the system, which no man could possibly administer and be virtuous;—while, on the other hand, a substantial reform, previously effected, would shelter him from the pressure of unjust and wicked solicitations.' These are remarkable words, and should be borne in mind. The truth of them had been founded upon an experience of the past, of which the whole assembly must have been cognisant; but the knowledge of this gave a sting to them which only still further exasperated the Cardinals, who were fully bent upon gaining their point. They then resorted to means of a venal character; till at last some of the German prelates joined them; and the Emperor, seeing himself deserted by nearly the whole Council, at last gave way, under protest, and with a stipulation that the new Pope should enter upon the business of reform at once, even before his coronation, and in concert with the Council; and with this additional proviso,—that he should not leave Constance until the work of reformation had been completed.

It was on this understanding that Martin V. was elected and ascended the papal chair. The Committee of Reform had only a few days before his election presented their report, with a scheme for a thorough correction of abuses. Its resolutions imposed several restrictions upon the Pope's

authority, regulated the affairs of the Court of Rome, and enforced the discipline of the secular clergy, and more especially against the two crimes of simony and concubinage. Pope Martin promised very readily that these matters should be attended to ; and at once appointed six Cardinals to confer with the Committee in revising their former labours. Differences of opinion, however, presently arose. The Cardinals were indefatigable in creating difficulties ; one delay after another occurred, until those most deeply anxious for the proposed reformation became very impatient, and addressed another remonstrance to the Committee. The French even were much provoked at this—what appeared to them—trifling ; and besought Sigismond to use his powerful influence with the Pope. The Emperor, however, still smarting from the treatment he had received from them, and feeling how much they had damaged the cause of reform by their opposition, received the deputation with scant ceremony, and reminded them how resolutely they had thwarted his endeavours to procure *a reformation before the Pope had been elected*, and that their only course now was to apply to him. ‘When we urged you,’ said the Emperor, ‘that reform should precede the election of a Pope, you scorned our judgment, and insisted upon having a Pope first. So you have a Pope, implore him for reform ! I had some power before a Pope was chosen ; now I have none.’ The Spaniards also threatened that unless they could obtain some reform they would have another Pope.¹

Martin, seeing that a storm was likely to arise, thought it expedient to temporise with the most determined, wisely offered some concessions, and then urged forward the dissolution of the Council. It was not, however, accomplished without some difficulty, and not till a promise was given that another council should be called together again in five years. But when the Council was dissolved, and the Pope

¹ The troubles of the great schism had before this suggested to some the idea of having several Popes instead of one, so that every great nationality might have a spiritual head.

found himself securely seated at Rome, he became as much the spiritual despot as ever any of his predecessors had been; and though some slight restrictions were enforced upon the clergy, and some abuses corrected, the work of reformation in the main remained unaccomplished, and a hateful tyranny ere long prevailed. In the year 1423 the Pope called another council together at Pavia, but it was only attended by Italian prelates. The ecclesiastics from other countries of Europe were either afraid to attend or considered it useless. The Council was afterwards convoked at Sienna, when not more than a dozen prelates from Germany, France, and Spain attended; but even when they attempted some resolutions relative to reform, the Pope took fright; and, under the pretence of there being too few prelates present, he procured the dissolution of the Council.

Martin's long pontificate, it is said, was principally devoted to two objects—the recovery of the States of the Church, and the amassing of wealth; in both of which he succeeded. As to the former, he restored them to nearly the same condition in which they stood before the schism. And with regard to the latter, the treasures which he collected were designed rather to enrich his own family, than to be used for the benefit of the Church, or even of the pontifical government.

The Council of Constance is notorious for its having ordered the bones of Wickliff to be exhumed, 'and thrown far away from the burial of any church.' There seems to have been great unwillingness in England to carry out this hateful decree, for it was not till thirteen years after, that his remains were disinterred, and burnt, and the ashes cast into the adjoining brook. In this the quaint Fuller sees a parable, for he says, 'The brook did convey his ashes to Avon; Avon to the Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wickliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over.'

But a more grievous and more atrocious thing was

decreed at the Council of Constance, which will for ever leave a stigma upon the name ; and this was the condemning Huss and Jerome of Prague to be burnt alive at the stake. Huss was a celebrated preacher and President of the University of Prague, and had for a long time boldly attacked the iniquities which prevailed. It is questionable whether the charge of heresy, for which this truly great and noble man was condemned, could be proved against him, even from the point of view held by his adversaries. There could be no question about the fervency of his piety, and his firmness in upholding what he regarded as the truth. He probably was wanting in prudence and conciliation, and too intemperate in his zeal. Pope John XXIII. had already excommunicated him ; but conscious of his own integrity, he was willing to defend himself against the accusations laid upon him. When therefore he was summoned before the Council of Constance, having obtained a ' safe conduct ' from the Emperor, he went, accompanied by several of the Bohemian nobility, and especially by his staunch friend John de Chalum.

It would be travelling too far out of our way to enter into all the painful but interesting circumstances connected with the condemnation of Huss, and only a few particulars respecting him can be briefly noticed,¹ and such as would most probably come to the ears of Thomas à Kempis. Soon after his arrival he was thrown into prison by the Pope's order. His friends in vain appealed to the Emperor for his release. Those who were appointed to try Huss persuaded the Emperor that it was his duty as a true son of the Church to violate his written word in protecting a heretic. Several times did Huss appear before the Council, for his trial was a protracted one ; and in the meantime many individuals—some of great note—were sent by the Council to argue with him and get him to retract what he had said, but he remained unshaken. One of these learned divines who visited Huss in prison said to him : ' If the

¹ A very graphic account of what happened will be found in Milman's *Latin Christianity*, book xiii. ch. ix.

Council should tell you that you had but one eye, though you have really two, you would be obliged to agree with the Council.' 'No,' said the intrepid Huss, 'while God keeps me in my senses I would not say such a thing against my conscience, on the entreaty or command of the whole world.'

The substance of the sentence pronounced upon him will show the nature of the accusations made against him. Brought from prison, pale yet resolute, he stood before the Council loaded with chains, when his sentence in the following terms was read out: 'That for several years John Huss has seduced and scandalised the people by the dissemination of many doctrines manifestly heretical, and condemned by the Church, especially those of John Wickliffe. That he has obstinately trampled upon the keys of the Church and the ecclesiastical censures. That he has appealed to Jesus Christ as sovereign judge, to the contempt of the ordinary judges of the Church; and that such an appeal was injurious, scandalous, and made in derision of ecclesiastical authority. That he has persisted to the last in his errors, and even maintained them in full Council. It is therefore ordained that he be publicly deposed and degraded from Holy Orders, as an obstinate and incorrigible heretic.' Being then handed over to the secular power, the Emperor, who had granted him a safe conduct, declared that he must be burnt to death, and 'the evil extirpated root and branch.' Before departing from the Council this courageous witness for the truth, we are told, lifted up his hands to heaven, and said, 'Behold, most gracious Saviour, how the Council condemns as an error what Thou hast prescribed and practised; when overborne by enemies Thou committedst Thy cause to God Thy Father, leaving us this example, that when we are oppressed, we may have recourse to the judgment of God;' and after a few more words, turning towards the Emperor and looking him full in the face, he added, 'I came voluntarily to this Council, under the public faith of the Emperor here present.' Upon pronouncing these words Sigismond blushed at the sudden

and unexpected rebuke, which was afterwards remembered against him.¹

The execution of his sentence was delayed awhile, and during this time his friends made strenuous efforts to save him, but all was of no avail. Taking from him the sacred vestments, they put a paper coronet, with three devils painted on it, on his head, and thus anathematised him, 'We devote thy soul to the infernal devils.' Then the devoted man said, 'I am glad to wear this crown of ignominy for the love of Him who wore a crown of thorns.' When he came to the stake where he was to be burnt, he kneeled down, and prayed with much fervour, and said among other things, 'Lord Jesus, I humbly suffer this cruel death for Thy sake, and I pray Thee to forgive all mine enemies.' The pile of wood was shortly kindled and he was burnt to death, while accents of prayer and praise issued from his mouth. Like many of the reformers Huss was not entirely free from error, but he held fast to his faith in Christ as the only Saviour, and to other essential truths of the Gospel, and taught men how to live according to its precepts. He, however, asserted, contrary to the opinions then received in the Church, that the Pope was only on a level with other Bishops; that the fires of purgatory had no existence; that prayers for the dead were a vain device; and that prayers to the saints departed were vain and unprofitable. He especially urged the people to be guided by the Holy Scriptures, and not to be led away by the errors of Popery, which he taught them to abhor, as contrary to God's truth.

Within a year of the martyrdom of Huss, Jerome, his disciple and friend, followed him to the stake. He was not much inferior, if any, to Huss in learning or ability, but he had not all through, the moral courage of his leader; and, though a master in theology, he was still a layman.

Before they proceeded to execute him, however, the

¹ When Charles V. was entreated at the Diet of Worms to imprison Luther, notwithstanding the safe conduct he had granted him, he replied, 'I should not choose to blush with my predecessor Sigismond.' *Oper. Huss.* ii.

Council received a solemn warning, which made them hesitate in the step they were taking. Soon after Huss had been put to death a formal expostulation was sent in, signed by about sixty of the nobility and other notable persons of Bohemia, to this effect—and it may be well to glance at it here, as it shows the state of mind which was abroad at the time : ‘ We know not from what motive ye have condemned John Huss, bachelor of divinity, and preacher of the Gospel. You have put him to a cruel and ignominious death, though convicted of no heresy. We wrote in his vindication to Sigismond, king of the Romans. This apology of ours was communicated to your congregations ; and we have been told that ye burnt it in contempt of us. We protest, therefore, with the heart as well as with the lips, that John Huss was a very honest man, just and orthodox ; that for many years he conversed among us with godly and blameless manners ; that during all those years he explained to us and to our subjects the Gospel and the books of the Old and New Testament, according to the exposition of holy doctors approved by the Church. . . . He taught us also to detest everything heretical. In his discourses he constantly exhorted us to the practise of peace and charity, and his own life exhibited to us a distinguished example of these virtues. . . . Ye have not only disgraced us by his condemnation, but have also unmercifully imprisoned, and perhaps already put to death, Jerome of Prague, a man of most profound learning and copious eloquence. Him also ye have condemned unconvicted. Notwithstanding all that has passed, we are resolved to sacrifice our lives for the defence of the Gospel of Christ and of His faithful preachers.’¹

Jerome had obtained also a safe conduct from the Emperor ; but it proved of no avail, as in the case of Huss. He exhibited great firmness at first, but after witnessing the sufferings of Huss his courage for awhile gave way, under the intimidations and promises of his adversaries ; for it is a sad admission to make, that he made a formal recan-

¹ *Hist. J. Huss, atque Hieron.*, Pragense, i. 98.

tation of what he had taught in a most shameful manner. He was not, however, suffered to have his liberty ; and in prison he had a short time to commune with his own soul, and to think over his sad defection. There were those in the Council, however, thirsting for his blood, and did not wish him to escape ; Gerson, the Chancellor of Paris, was the leader of them, and had been foremost for the execution of Huss. Jerome was brought before the Council again, and examined upon fresh charges made against him. Then it was that the soul of this servant of God rose within him ; and, emerging from the depths of woe and humiliation to which his recantation had sunk him, he made his defence. After having told the Council that his persecutors had alienated their minds from him, he said, ‘I came here of my own accord to justify myself, which a man conscious of guilt would scarcely have done ; those who know my course of life and studies, know that my time has been spent in works and exercises of a very different tendency to anything wicked or heretical.’ And vindicating the character of John Huss, he told them that they had put to death an innocent man, and that he was ready also to lay down his life after his example. ‘I came to Constance,’ he continued, ‘to defend John Huss, because I had advised him to go thither, and had promised to come to his assistance in case he should be oppressed. Nor am I ashamed here to make a public confession of my own cowardice. I confess, and tremble while I think of it, that, through fear of punishment by fire, I basely consented against my conscience to the condemnation of the doctrine of Wickliff and Huss.’ And having renounced his recantation, as the greatest crime he had ever been guilty of, he was ordered back again to prison.

Jerome’s words seem to have impressed several members of the Council, and another attempt was made to get him to retract once more, but in vain. He was then delivered over to the secular powers to be put to death ; and as he went to his execution he sang the Apostle’s Creed, and the hymns of the Church, with a loud and cheerful voice.

When the executioner tried to kindle the faggots behind his back, he exclaimed, 'Place the fire before me; if I dreaded it, I could have escaped it.'

Part of an account given by one who was opposed to him, but had otherwise an admiration of him, will sufficiently show the character of the man. 'His voice was sweet and full, and his action every way proper either to express indignation or to raise pity; but he made no affected application to the passions. Firm and intrepid he stood before the Council, collected in himself, and not only contemning, but seemingly desirous of death. The greatest character in ancient story could not possibly have exceeded him. If there be any justice in history, this man will be admired by all posterity. I call him a prodigious man, and the epithet is not extravagant; I was an eyewitness of his whole behaviour, and could easily be more prolix on a subject so copious.'¹

It is worthy of notice that Robert Hallam, Bishop of Salisbury, was in no wise disposed to proceed to extremes with these men. Though on one occasion, in an outburst of indignation at the ungodly deeds which had been perpetrated, he exclaimed, that 'the Pope deserved to be burnt at the stake,' he was almost the only one of the prelates of the Council at Constance who stood out against condemning any of the so-called heretics to death. Quoting the words of Scripture he said, 'God wouldeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent and live;' and therefore condign punishment must be left to Him. His death, which happened before the close of the Council, was a sad loss to his party; and it is not too much to say that had he lived, more than one sad mistake would probably have been averted.

The Bohemians were justly indignant, and roused to a high pitch of excitement at the treachery and baseness of the leading members of the Council of Constance, who with the Emperor, unmindful of their pledge, put both these singularly earnest and pious men to death. Huss

¹ *Letter of Poggius to Aretin.*

and Jerome were worthily held in high esteem. And the martyrdom of these men was regarded not only as a gross insult to the nation, but as a personal loss, as a personal blow to thousands who had been taught by them, or had come indirectly under their influence.

In narrating matters of moment that transpired in the days of Thomas à Kempis, we cannot well pass over the exciting adventures and heart-rending accounts of the conflicts which took place with the Bohemians, in the attempt made by the papal party to quench the rising spirit of the Reformation. And à Kempis was much nearer to them than those living in England were.

Shortly after the martyrdom of John Huss, and the protest had been sent in to the Council by the Bohemian nobles, alluded to already, Wenceslaus, the Bohemian monarch—who openly denounced Sigismond for his treacherous behaviour, and the Council for its barbarous cruelty—on a certain occasion noticed one of his nobles deeply abstracted in thought, and consequently asked him what he was pondering upon. Ziska, for such was his name, answered, ‘I was thinking about the affront offered to our kingdom by the death of John Huss.’ ‘It is not in your power or mine,’ replied the King, ‘to revenge it, but if you see any way of doing it, take the matter vigorously in hand.’ And from that time Ziska projected those military exploits for which he afterwards became so renowned.

Bohemia was at that time one of the most prosperous countries in Europe. Success had attended her industry and commercial enterprise ; and that she was well disposed to religion may be judged by the many splendid churches that adorned the land, and the liberal endowments provided for the clergy and those living in the monasteries. The clergy and monks, however, belonged to the papal party, and were not in sympathy with the feelings of the people ; yet, with an austere and fatal perversity, they paraded their spiritual authority over them, threatening them with interdicts, and in many instances depriving them

of religious rites and consolations, with the design of dragooning the nation into submission. This only exasperated the people to a settled and determined opposition, and when they heard of the death of their honoured countrymen, who had stood forth in their midst as the defenders of their faith, against prevailing errors and abuses, the die was cast ; they felt their faith in Christ—which they held dearer than life—to be at stake, their last hopes of redress, or finding toleration or liberty of conscience, from their spiritual rulers and those who governed the Church, were blasted ; there was nothing for it but to take up the challenge, assert their own independence, and provide for their future safety against the oncoming torrent of persecution which was about to be directed against them.

Among other things the Council of Constance had forbidden the use of the cup to the laity in the Holy Communion. Gerson, the Chancellor of Paris, was one of the chief advocates for this measure. And one of the first acts which united the various sections of the Bohemians was to resist this prohibition. It was an unlawful intrenchment upon their religious privileges ; and they resolved not to submit to it. In a large gathering of the principal men from various parts of the country, three hundred tables were spread in the open air, and the Holy Sacrament administered in *both kinds* to an immense multitude.

On the tidings of this coming to the ears of the Council, fresh edicts were issued against the Bohemians, which only still further inflamed the passions of the people, and determined them to resist unto death any attempt to subjugate them. At last a Papal Bull instituting a crusade against them was published, and then all hopes of reconciliation were gone, and they prepared for the worst.

Terrible are the accounts given of what followed. The Bohemians turned out the priests and monks from among them, for they were for the most part on the side of their enemies ; and upon their showing the least sign of resistance they put them to death without the shadow of remorse.

Churches were laid waste and the altars often besprinkled with the blood of those who ministered at them. This was done not only as a retribution for past offences, but from policy, that they might not have those in their midst who would prove traitors to them in the coming struggle, and side with their foes.

In the meantime Sigismond had succeeded Wenceslaus to the throne of Bohemia in the year 1419, and he took upon him to suppress the Hussites by force of arms; and great numbers of them were put to death in the most horrible manner. The Bohemians, irritated by this, as well as by his past treachery, and the dishonour he had done them, refused to receive him as their sovereign. But this could not be done without a struggle. Already had he put down an insurrection with savage cruelty at Breslau, hoping thereby to strike terror into the hearts of those at Prague; and it indeed made them dread his approach. He burned without scruple all heretical teachers that fell into his hands, executing them after much indignity and suffering had been endured.

The Bohemians, however, were ready for the Imperial forces, and rose up as one man to withstand the invading enemy. Ziska was chosen as their leader, and with intrepid valour he led on his followers to the fight, and distinguished himself by repeatedly defeating the Imperial crusaders. And not only was his own great military genius and indomitable resolution displayed, so as at once to inspire his followers with courage and strike terror into the breasts of his enemies, but the deep religious enthusiasm and pious devotion of all who were combined with him were called forth in a remarkable degree. Mosheim tells us that, at the commencement of the war, they seemed to agree both in their religious sentiments and in their demands upon the Church and Government from which they had withdrawn themselves. But as their numbers increased, their union diminished; and their army being prodigiously augmented by a confluence of strangers from all quarters, a great dissension arose among

them, which, in the year 1420, came to an open rupture, and divided this multitude into two great factions, which were distinguished by the titles of *Calixtines* and *Taborites*. The former—who were so called from their insisting upon the use of the *cup*, or chalice, in the celebration of the Eucharist—were mild in their proceedings, and modest in their demands, and showed no disposition to overturn the ancient system of Church government, or to make any considerable changes in the religion which was publicly received.

All that they required may be comprehended under the four articles which follow. They demanded : *first*, that the Word of God should be explained to the people in a plain and perspicuous manner, without the mixture of superstitious comments or inventions ; *secondly*, that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be administered *in both kinds* ; *thirdly*, that the clergy, instead of employing all their attention and zeal in the acquisition of riches and power, should turn their thoughts to objects more suitable to their profession, and be ambitious of living and acting as became the successors of the holy Apostles ; and, *fourthly*, that the transgressions of a more heinous kind, or mortal sins, should be punished in a manner suitable to their enormity. . . .

The *Taborites* derived their name from a mountain they called Tabor, as bearing some relation to that mentioned in sacred history. Here they erected tents at the first, and held their religious meetings, and administered the Lord's Supper in both kinds ; afterwards they raised a considerable fortification for its defence, and adorned it with a well-built and regular city. This section of the Hussites made larger demands. They not only insisted upon reducing the religion of Jesus to its primitive simplicity, but required also that the system of ecclesiastical government should be reformed in the same manner, the authority of the Pope destroyed, the form of Divine worship changed ; they demanded, in a word, the erection of a new church, a new hierarchy, in which Christ alone should

reign, and all things should be carried on by a Divine impulse. There were in this section some wild enthusiasts, who, to purify the Church, would carry fire and sword into every country. And it is to this fanatic class of the Hussites alone that we are to look, as accountable for all those abominable acts of violence, rapine, desolation, and murder, which are too indiscriminately laid to the charge of the Hussites in general, and to their two leaders, Ziska and Procopius, in particular. It must indeed be acknowledged that a great part of the Hussites had imbibed the most barbarous sentiments with respect to the obligation of executing vengeance upon their enemies, against whom they breathed nothing but bloodshed and fury, without any mixture of humanity or compassion.¹

It is beyond my purpose to do more than to give a brief outline of what was passing in Europe during the lifetime of Thomas à Kempis; so I can but just touch upon the varying fortunes of the Hussites in their endeavour to throw off the yoke of Popery, to withstand some of its errors, and to defend themselves against persecution. It will give the reader an idea of the resolute determination there was to have religious liberty in the century previous to the Reformation. In the first regular encounter the Hussites had, they broke through the ranks of their invading foes, and the Emperor had to fly for his life from the very walls of Prague. The year after this the Emperor brought a large German army against them, which they again defeated and utterly routed; 'the now renowned and irresistible Ziska, in the rear, bearing down whole squadrons, and revenging the unspeakable barbarities inflicted on his countrymen.' In the third year, *i.e.* 1422, the Emperor invaded Moravia with an army of Hungarians; but they could not stand before the infuriated zeal of Ziska, and his 'wild war-chariots,' who pursued after them as they fled, and massacred them with unrelenting vengeance. And now Bohemia seemed by the force of her arms to have maintained her right of independence, and wholly to have ab-

¹ See Mosheim, *Eccles. Hist.*, and references, Cent. XV. part ii. ch. iii.

jured any subjection to the papacy. Even the Archbishop of Prague, to the utter confusion and indignation of the papal party, accepted the four articles of Prague specially held by the Calixtines.

But now it was, when they had rest for awhile from their enemies, that divisions crept in among them ; and shortly afterwards Ziska, their champion, died of the plague in 1424. The papal party, thinking that they were weakened and disunited, took fresh courage ; and again raised up forces to proceed against them and subdue them. But they were a little mistaken in their calculations. In times of imminent peril and at the approach of a common enemy, the Bohemians sunk their differences, and became again as one compact body, resolving to die rather than yield.

The same year in which they lost their renowned leader, and when the crusading army again came against them, another was chosen, little inferior to Ziska in skilful warfare. This was blind Procopius, who had formerly been a priest among them. Kind of heart, he was stirred up to a fiery zeal to repel the invasion, and he roused the hearts of all the people to defend their liberties, and maintain their independence by the sword. And yet he himself fought not, for as he solemnly declared before the Council of Basle which assembled a few years afterwards, 'he had never shed a drop of blood with his own hands, though he had commanded in many battles. Bohemia had been forced to fight against the armies sent against them by the Pope and Cardinals, and upon them rested all the guilt.'

As the events of this period are concisely and graphically given by Milman, I prefer here quoting his words, to giving any other lengthened account. Under Procopius, the third crusade, which had lingered on for two or three years, was discomfited in the final battle of Aussitz. So total was the rout, that the Germans, not without cause, dreaded the irruption of these formidable conquerors into their own territories. Erfurt, Jena, Halle, even Magdeburg,

already saw the fierce Procopius, and heard the rattlings of his waggons under their walls.

Shame, indignation, terror, prudence, demanded a better organised, better-disciplined army, than those which had been hastily raised in different parts of Germany. The banner of the Empire was unfurled. From the Danube to its Hungarian shores, up to the Black Forest, from the Alps to the borders of Flanders, contingents were required; temporal and spiritual powers, nobles and bishops, knights and burghers, crowded to the imperial standard; 200,000 men were in arms. A new Order was instituted; the banner bore the Virgin and the Infant Saviour. All this magnificent preparation ended in almost incredible disgrace. The three divisions of the vast army, or rather the three armies, fled without striking a blow, abandoning all their treasures, munitions, carriages, cannon. Henry of Winchester alone, at the head of a band of English crusaders, endeavoured but in vain to arrest the utter rout.

The crusades against the Hussites had made the Hussites what the Saracens had long been to the Christian world, and they became as Saracens to the whole of Germany. They would no longer wait to be assailed. They assembled on the White Mountain near Prague, 50,000 foot, 20,000 horse, with their impregnable waggons which they built up as a fortress at a few hours' warning, a garrisoned citadel in the enemy's land. On every side they broke out unresisted, except by the stronger cities. Austria, even as Hungary, Lausitz, Saxony, were a waste. Leipsic escaped only through her fortifications. Coburg and Bayreuth were in flames. Nuremberg, Bamberg, closed their gates in terror. The Marquis of Brandenburg, the Bishop of Bamberg, bought the retreat of the Bohemians at great cost. Everywhere *révenge*, religious hatred, fierce fanaticism, marked their way with unspeakable horrors. They thought it but compliance with the Divine command to dispeople the land of the Philistines, the Edomites and the Moabites.

Sigismond at length attempted milder measures;

pacific negotiations began, but the religious question could not be reconciled. The Emperor demanded the unqualified submission of the Bohemians to the decrees of a General Council, to which they were to be admitted in perfect freedom. The Taborites, who might well mistrust, would contract no such obligations. The Orphans, Ziska's section of the milder party, promulgated the new doctrine, that a free people needed no king.

Nothing remained but a fifth crusade. An army of 100,000 men crossed the Bohemian frontier. In the battle of Taas (August 14, 1431), the Bohemians won a victory no less signal and complete than on former fields. Again the Pope's Legate, the Cardinal Julian Cæsarini, alone conducted himself with courage; he was at last constrained to fly; he hardly escaped in the disguise of a common soldier, and left behind him the Papal Bull for the crusade, his Cardinal's hat, and his pontifical robes. These trophies remained in the Church of Taas for two centuries. The banners were hung in Tron Church in Prague.

The same brilliant writer in taking a survey of what happened says: The Hussite war had already almost filled the whole period of more than thirteen years from the close of the Council of Constance to the opening of the Council of Basle. It lasted during the whole of the pontificate of Martin V., who contemplated it far aloof, if with horror and dismay, it is to be hoped not without some commiseration, though he might think it his duty to stimulate it and keep it alive with all his authority. Safe in Rome, he heard, but from a distance, the thundering roll of Ziska's chariots, the shrieks of cities stormed, the wail of armies mowed down by the scythe. . . They were years of terrible and fatal glory in the history of Bohemia, of achievements marvellous as to valour, military skill, patriotism, and the passion for civil and religious freedom. Of all wars none was so horribly, remorselessly, ostentatiously cruel as this—a war of races, of languages, and of religion. It was a strife of revenge, of reprisal, of exter-

mination, considered to be the holiest of duties. On one side no faith was to be kept, no mercy shown to heretics ; to cut off the spreading plague by any means was paramount to all principles of law or Gospel. On the other vengeance was to be wrecked on the enemies of God's people, and therefore the enemies of God ; to root out idolatry was the mission of the Bohemians ; mortal sin was to be cut off with the righteous sword ; and the whole priesthood, all monks, friars, nuns, were so utterly depraved, according to their sweeping condemnation, that it was only to fulfil the Divine commandment to extirpate the irreclaimable Order. These relentless theories were relentlessly carried into more terrible practice.¹ Both sides at last became weary and disgusted with such an unholy warfare, and a party arose anxious to bring about peace.

I shall not, however, at present proceed to consider the measures adopted on both sides to bring about an agreement of some kind, as I have already come near the period to which I have brought the narrative of à Kempis. The brief outline of Church history which I have given will, however, sufficiently show the reader what was passing in the larger circle of Christendom during the first and larger part of his long life. Purposing again to take up this history further on, I must now return to the interests of the smaller circle in which he lived and daily moved.

¹ See *Latin Christianity*, book xiii. ch. xi.

CHAPTER XXV.

Events, 1453-1467—À Kempis pursues his labours—Another volume of his works written out by him—A lay Brother drowned—Records of other Brethren and eminent men among them who died—Another Prior elected—The pestilence appears among them—Relics of St. Agnes—Various particulars of interest connected with the Brotherhood—A Kempis's love of retirement—Two of his letters—His preaching—One of his sermons—Anecdotes.

THOMAS À KEMPIS was becoming well advanced in years ; I speak of him now as being about seventy-five years old ; but as usual with him he gives little information respecting himself. I have had occasion to make a similar remark before, but it becomes more apparent as he grows older,—there is little to lay hold of regarding him, for he does not like to talk or write about himself or about his feelings openly ; and it is often only by some incidental remark that we become aware of some change in his life. Now in one of the entries in the Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes shortly after this time, which we give below, there is a passing allusion respecting some other person than himself as having occupied the post of Sub-prior ; hence we cannot but assume that Thomas had, from some cause or another, resigned this post. Probably he had desired it finding that greater quiet was necessary for him, for more devotion, and for labours of love and piety ; whilst, on the other hand, it might be deemed advisable for the community that the office should be filled by a more active and younger man, and that he himself should take his place more distinctly as one of the three senior Brethren, who seem to have acted as a standing council of the monastery along with the Prior at their head.

We must not suppose, however, that Thomas now gave up active work, and took to a life of ease ; no ! there is

every reason to believe that he continued, as long as ever he could, to live up to the full exercise of the faculties and abilities God gave him, as much as ever. There is in the Royal Library of Brussels a monument of his diligence at this very period of life, which testifies to his continued labours and industry, and taken along with other things shows that he led no indolent life; it consists of another volume of several of his works, similar to that in which we find the books of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' which, like this latter volume, he had copied out and gathered together from separate treatises which he had composed years before; though those copied out about this period are in a somewhat larger and neater hand than those completed in 1441.¹ As at the close of the volume dated 1441 Thomas had subscribed his name as well as the year, when he had finished it, so in this other volume he does likewise, in the following colophon:—*Anno Domini M°.CCCC°.LVI. finitus et scriptus per manus fratris Thomæ Kempensis.* Thomas would then be in his seventy-seventh year; and this had been his main outward employment for the last two or three years. There are those who are able to tell pretty well in most instances from a specimen of anyone's usual handwriting what his character is; but without attempting this in respect of what à Kempis actually wrote, it is clear that he had none of the weaknesses and infirmities of old age creeping on him as yet apparent. There is a firmness of hand, a regularity in the writing, and a distinctness of stroke in the formation of the letters, which denote that he still preserved the faculties of his mind and body in active and regular operation; so that from the clear and manly style of his writing at this time, if we may judge anything from it, we should be disposed to say that he was in good bodily health, in the full enjoyment of his mental powers, and in a happy frame of mind. Turning, however, now to the Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes, he records a few events which I must notice. And in mentioning the

¹ Specimens of the handwriting from both these volumes are given in the *Authorship of the De Imitatione Christi*, Rivingtons.

characters of several that died, he continues to bear witness to the striking but pleasing fact, that in this corrupt and turbulent age, when there seemed to be such a dearth of spiritual life, there were a few to be found even then, living very earnest and devout lives, in all godly quietness and humbleness of mind.

In this same year, 1456, a sad and most disastrous calamity occurred in relation to one of the lay associates of the monastery which caused no little consternation and grief in the House. It appears that on the feast of St. James the Apostle (July 25), this man, for the sake of rescuing some hay, had gone forth with four strong horses, well able to draw the cart, and had ventured too far into the water ; for he with the four horses by some means lost footing, and were drowned in a deep lake, which owing to a late excess of rain had rendered the place more dangerous than it was at other times. Much damage had been caused by the rain, and the farmers were anxious to prevent further loss as far as they could. The remains of this servant of God were recovered, and brought back to the monastery, and buried after compline in the cemetery of the laity. Afterwards prayers were offered up for him by the Brethren in the office of the mass. By the providence of God he, with the other lay associates, had received the Holy Communion on St. James's Day, in the morning, before starting out, according to the usual custom. He had lived with them one year, and was very skilful and diligent in the business of a smith.

It is God, blessed over all, observes Thomas, who smites and yet heals ; for we suffered more than a hundred florins in the drowning of the horses, but, on the other hand, the merciful Lord preserved our whole country from the ravaging army of the Duke of Burgundy, who had besieged Deventer, for after the feast of St. Matthew, having come to an understanding with the citizens of the various towns of our country, he was pacified and retired.

The death of many other Brethren and lay associates are still from time to time recorded, together with the

investment of new Brothers, along with various little particulars respecting them individually, which it is not necessary on all occasions to notice, deeming it better to give only such accounts as have some interest in them, or such as Thomas himself would be more intimately concerned in. About this period we have the death of the shoemaker of the monastery recorded, also of the cellarer, of the porter and of one who had the chief management of the farming operations. These, although occupying lower stations, were pious devotees, and useful members of the conventual body, the loss of whom would be deeply felt by the Brethren.

There is one of the Brethren who died in the year 1456 of whom some mention should be made, because he was more nearly connected with, and spiritually allied to, à Kempis than many others alluded to ; this was Brother William Cowman, who died early in the morning of St. Lucy's Day, the Virgin and Martyr (December 13), at the beginning of high mass, aged seventy-eight years and four months. He was a true devotee and a strenuous upholder of discipline, according to the account given by Thomas, having lived humbly a long time with the Brethren. By the help of God he had lived fifty-five years as a 'religious,' having completed that number of years since his profession on the feast of St. Brixius, or Britius, Bishop (November 13), which was the day of his investiture, and the last day on which he celebrated. After this he began to be very infirm up to St. Lucy's Day, when he terminated his life in a blessed struggle, and was buried in the east transept by the side of Brother John Zantwic. He left many good evidences behind him of his patience, poverty, and abstinence, worthy of being imitated by posterity. He was the Procurator of this House, says à Kempis, in the time of William Vorniken, the second Prior ; afterwards he was Subprior ; then for three years he was Prior of the monastery near Amersford ; lastly he was Rector of the devout Sisters in Canopia, near Campen, for fourteen years ; at length becoming very old, and deficient in hearing, he returned to

his own spiritual home in the Mount and died in peace. He was buried among the Brethren in the customary way.

In the year 1457 there died in Zwolle, in the night following the day of St. Benedict, Abbot (March 21), at eleven o'clock, of blessed memory, the venerable Father and gracious Priest Theodoric Herxen, in the seventy-sixth year of his age. He was the second Rector of the House of the Clerics in Zwolle during forty-seven years, and the confessor of a multitude of devout Brothers and Sisters. His own life from early years was one of strict morality and virtue.¹

In the same year, in the month of October, there died in Zwolle—so à Kempis records—‘our Brother, Gerard Wesep, who had been sent to the Monastery of Belheem, whither out of obedience and from fraternal charity he had gone after the death of many of the Brethren in that place, and as a faithful spiritual Brother, to attend to those who were dying. He himself was at last called away, and his body was brought over, and carried on a hearse to our House, about the hour of vespers, and was, as he desired, buried in the eastern portion with his Brethren, by the side of the Sub-prior William Cowman. He died in the fifty-sixth year of his “profession,” and in the seventy-seventh year of his age. He wrote many books for the choir, for the library, and for prayer, in Latin and German, and vigorously undertook much labour for the common welfare. But chiefly was he very devoted and attentive to the infirm, and to those passing through the agonies of death, not shrinking from close attendance upon the sick and those smitten with the pestilence, on account of his love to God and the Brethren. God did not, however, forget to remunerate him for what he had done for the Brethren who died at Belheem, for, having been laid up with the pestilence fifteen days, he was taken from his present labours and excessive toils to eternal rest and peace, the which he had long desired, and was wont to speak of to me with his hands joined together.’ May we not infer from this last sentence

¹ *Chron. Mt. St. Agnes*, ch. xxvi.

that, upon learning of his sickness, à Kempis himself had gone to nurse this Brother, since he here speaks of being with him and listening to his eager desire to depart, and be at rest. This is probable, for the place was not more than three miles distant from Mount St. Agnes, being the neighbouring town in which another House of the Brethren was established, with whom those on the Mount had frequent intercourse.

In the same year, Thomas says, our beloved Brother, James Cluit, a devout priest and the first Rector in Udem, died, and was buried in that place before the high altar in the fifty-third year of his life. His memory will remain a blessing and a praise, since he was beloved of God and by us, for his strict and exemplary piety.

On St. Matthew's Day (September 21), 1458, Henry of Deventer, the fourth Prior of Mount St. Agnes, resigned his office, which led to the election of Father George in his place. Thomas à Kempis informs us that the retirement of Henry was owing to a lengthened illness, which compelled him to lie on a couch, and incapacitated him from discharging his duties with satisfaction to himself; therefore he besought the Brethren with tears that he might be relieved of his responsibility. They were consequently much distressed on hearing this, but saw the reasonableness of it; and the request having been properly looked into by those in authority, was readily granted. À Kempis being one of the three senior Brethren, though he had now probably ceased to be Sub-prior, was much concerned in the matter, and was greatly interested in it for the future welfare of the monastery. Father George, who was chosen to be the Prior after Henry of Deventer, had formerly been a Brother of this House, but at this time was Prior of a House in Brilis. He was elected in the usual way, at the end of a three days' fast, after the manner recorded in the election of the previous Prior, the venerable Father Prior of Windesheim with two Brethren being present, and the Prior of Zwolle, to take the votes of the Brethren, and to see that all was done according to the statutes of their House.

Prior George is afterwards spoken of as a most affectionate Father, and a lover of regular discipline.

In the same year Thomas records the appearance of another pestilence at Deventer, Zwolle, and Campen, when many of the devout Brethren and Sisters in these places departed to be with Christ.

In the same year (1458) à Kempis records the death of 'our beloved Brother and Sub-prior Henry Ruhorst, aged forty, who was buried by the side of William Cowman.' This is a short entry, but it is important to notice it because it informs us that Thomas à Kempis had ceased to be Sub-prior. This death of Ruhorst would necessarily involve the election of another Sub-prior in his place, but no account is given of it. This, together with the election of another Prior, would cause a thorough change in the House with regard to those who had the government of it. There is little doubt, however, that à Kempis, though he keeps himself in the background, exercised a great influence still in the monastery, not only on account of his being a senior Brother, but also in respect of the repute in which he was held at this time.

Passing over the accounts of several other deaths, we come to that of an aged 'donatus,' or associate, named Everard, the cook, a native of Wetterend, who died on the feast of the Epiphany, 1459, being upwards of eighty years old, concerning whom à Kempis makes the following remarks. 'In the earlier part of his life he dwelt at Deventer with Lambert Gale, the tailor,¹ and began to be a devout man in the days of Florentius, who sent him to Windesheim; and later on the Brethren there transferred him to Mount St. Agnes; that was, before the time when the Brethren were invested with the religious habit of their Order. And he it was who mended the garments of the early Brethren, and prepared the vestments for the first four of the Brethren who were made Canons Regular, as related in the former part of the Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes, A.D. 1398. He was afterwards appointed to be cook for the Brethren, and

¹ Sartore.

served them all faithfully in that capacity for upwards of thirty years.' These things are noted because à Kempis had been long intimately acquainted with him, having known him whilst at Deventer, and had frequent opportunities of personal intercourse with him, especially when he took his turn to assist in the kitchen. For being about the same age with Thomas, and of a humble origin, this intimacy, extending over sixty years, must have endeared them to each other. At length, fatigued with age, Everard was relieved from his labours for the remainder of his days, and died in peace, an old man, and full of years.¹

We continue the Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes:—

In the same year (1459), after the octave of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, on the festival of the saintly martyrs Protus and Hyacinthus² (September 11), about twelve o'clock 'post meridiem,' our *Donatus* Gerard Hombolt, of Utrecht, died, aged 59. He was very faithful, laborious, and a devout servant of God. He was at first our 'hospitarius' and afterwards the 'refectorarius' of the Brethren. He was very cleanly and virtuous, preserving all things intrusted to him. He also procured all the necessary vessels, table linen, and towels.³ On one occasion when many guests came to the monastery, he said to the cook that he would provide what was necessary. For, becoming anxious on account of the unusual multitude of guests, the cook began to be distressed, fearing that there would not be sufficient for everyone, as he was desirous that there should be. Gerard Hombolt therefore, trusting in God, said to him, 'Make the sign of the Cross over the vessels and the food that is cooked, and God will give His blessing and sufficiency.' And the cook did as it was bidden him in confidence, he blessed it again and again. And behold,

¹ *Chron. Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, Thom. à Kemp., ch. xxvii.

² These two martyrs were brothers, and suffered at the same time during the persecutions of Valerian, in the third century. Undaunted by the threats of the worldly sovereign, they would rather die than renounce allegiance to their heavenly King, and so they laid down their lives for the faith of Him who died for them.

³ Manutergia.

the gracious Lord, seeing their faith, gave the increase, so that all had a sufficiency ; and dinner being ended, a great abundance was left, inasmuch that those who remained for supper had plenty to satisfy their hunger. In his early manhood before he entered the monastery he had visited the Holy Land with great devotion, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and other holy places sacred to the memory of our Blessed Saviour ; and he still purposed to visit it again in a devout spirit before he died if permitted. But the merciful Lord changed his affections from the terrestrial Jerusalem to the heavenly Jerusalem. He lived with us thirty-five years, and died in the fifty-ninth year of his age. From him à Kempis and the other Brethren often heard the account of his visit to Palestine, and listened to his recital of what he had seen, as he described to them the character of the several places with great and sacred interest ; for had he not trodden the very places where the Lord had been, and looked upon the spots which He had gazed upon, and made memorable by His words and deeds of wonder, love, and mercy.

There is the record of another death in 1461, which must not be omitted ; for though the individual was not one of the Brethren, he was nevertheless living in the neighbourhood, and had shown no little kindness to them in a time of sore distress ; and à Kempis makes mention of him out of grateful remembrance for what he had done. The name of the individual was Herder Stael, an honourable citizen of Zwolle, who died early in the morning before *prime* on St. Emerentian's Day (January 23), aged seventy-three. He (with his wife), says à Kempis, was for many years a special and faithful friend of our House, and particularly showed his friendship in the season of our tribulation under Bishop Rodolph, when our Brethren were compelled to leave their monastery, and went to Friesland, to the monastery of our Order at Lunenkerk. He took upon himself the management of their lands during their absence, gathering in the crops, and faithfully transmitting the fruits to the Brethren in their exile. They had long ago

returned to St. Agnes ; years had passed by, but he often visited them, and was drawn into closer union with them. This good man had an earnest wish, and interceded before his death, that he might dwell with them in their monastery, with the good and firm purpose of serving God more devoutly ; and this was accorded to him for nearly a whole year, when he died in great peace, at a good old age. He was buried in one of the side aisles of the Church, in the presence of his friends from Zwolle.¹

In the same year, 1461, the venerable Prior of Mount St. Agnes obtained for their House, from the senior Canon of the Church of Utrecht, an ancient wooden coffer or ark containing the relics of the Virgin and Martyr St. Agnes, to whose honour their church and monastery were dedicated.² He sent two Brethren to fetch it, and had it brought into the church with great devotion and reverence, and placed in the sacarium of the choir, near the high altar, under an arch in the north wall. In this simple chest of wood, bound round with plates of gold and silver, the sacred bones of St. Agnes had rested for nearly 350 years, until a new and beautiful ark, adorned as before named with gold and silver, was made for it.

And now, after a few other records, Thomas à Kempis relates the death of their former Prior, Henry of Deventer, who died happily in the midst of the Brethren with Prior George, who were praying around him at the time. He

¹ *Chron. Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, ch. xxix. pp. 121, 122.

² St. Agnes suffered martyrdom in the reign of Diocletian. Having taken a vow of chastity she was sorely persecuted while still very young, and many vain efforts were made to overcome her faith, and subject her to vile outrage. Having refused to burn incense to idols, and having instead made the sign of the Cross to show her faith in Christ and her adherence to Him, when the officer commanded her to yield, she was beheaded, and died apparently without much actual torture. The name of St. Agnes stands as virgin and martyr in the black-letter calendar of the English Church Prayer Book for the 21st day of January. She is one out of the four whose faith was to be kept in memory by the Church of England, as appointed by the Synod of Worcester, A.D. 1240. The other three are St. Margaret, St. Lucy, and St. Agatha. The account of St. Agnes is the more interesting in reference to Thomas à Kempis and his Brethren, because their monastery was dedicated to her memory, and they especially regarded her as their patron saint.

lived four years with them after he had retired from the priorship ; and a most endearing memorial of his character is given of him by our author. ‘He was courteous, exemplary, and devout ; respectful to all, burdensome to none ; he was kind, consolatory, compassionate, communicative, and cheerful towards all, yet quiet and retiring in his manner. He was humble and affable among the senior Brethren and superiors, and gentle and amiable to the younger Brethren and the infirm. It was on account of his good and modest disposition, and his very honourable character—allied to his fidelity and honesty in transacting business, in keeping his position, in speaking, and in being silent as a “religious” ought to be,—that he was first made Procurator, and afterwards chosen to be the Sub-prior, and at length, by the favour of God, elected to be the fourth Prior of our House, which he held in peace and charity with all. He was ten years Prior, and ruled those under him with a gracious and modest demeanour rather than by terrifying words. Persevering in devout discourse, prayer, and meditation, he died in the sixty-first year of his age, and in the forty-second of his religious course, and was buried on the right hand of Brother John Zuermont. Many things could be said about him, similar to what the blessed Bernard wrote concerning Humbert, a friend of God and his devout Sub-prior, who was beloved of God and men ; for, as the servant of Christ, Henry studied to imitate his Lord and Master.’¹

In recording the deaths of the Brethren and friends of the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes there are many short notices or kind memorials of the departed ; and as they throw some light upon the picture or home-scene of the community where Thomas, now advanced in years, lived, and still exercised a prominent influence, a few of them are still selected for notice.

Deric ten Water, an honourable citizen and sheriff² of

¹ *Chron. Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, Thom. à Kemp., ch. xxix. pp. 126, 127.

² Scabinus.

Zwolle, an accepted 'boarder,'¹ and very favourably inclined towards the devotees, died in our House. From a design of serving God more entirely and of remaining with us, he had been six weeks as a guest and an invalid, and was very beneficent to our House in life and death. And being strengthened with the Sacraments of the Church, he rested in peace in the sixty-eighth year of his life. À Kempis as senior Brother often visited him, and ministered spiritual consolation to him. Deric was buried in the sepulchre of his mother, in a stone sarcophagus before the altar of the Holy Cross.

In September 1462, John Robert, an humble and devout lay Brother, died, aged forty. At first he had the charge of our sheep, but afterwards was made the porter of our monastery. With him Thomas must have had many a passing word, as he went in and out. He was very faithful and compassionate to the poor, and having lived twelve years very dutifully in our monastery he slept in peace, and was buried in the portion of the cemetery reserved for the laity.

In the same year, during Advent, on the octave of St. Andrew's Day, before the hour of *prime*, the aged Gerard Poelman, an associate² of ours, died. He was a native of Zwolle, and had lived with us in this House, says à Kempis, sixty-two years, and when we were as yet very poor in lands, buildings, books, and sacred vestments. But his parents were truly our friends, and, being moderately rich, they often succoured our House with many liberal donations, giving money, and bestowing land, because they were pleased that their sons, Henry and this Gerard, the younger of the two, should choose to live with us. Their only sister, Aleydis, a devout virgin, presided for many years as superior³ over the House of the Beguines in New Street, where at length she died among them, and was buried in Bethlehem among the Brothers Regular. Gerard was a long time, with his Brother Henry, as the shoemaker of our monastery; afterwards he was for a lengthened

¹ Commensalis.² Donatus.³ Rectrix.

period our faithful fisherman. Then becoming greatly debilitated he became our good gardener, and cultivated divers sorts of herbs. At length, oppressed with age and unable to bear fatigue, the good old man died at the age of eighty-one, and received for his labours a crown of life in the kingdom of glory. He was buried in the cemetery for the laity, on the west side of the church, the burial rite being performed by our venerable and devout Father George.¹

Sundry items, of both a pleasing and adverse character, are occasionally interspersed in the Chronicle.

Thus for instance, in the year 1464, on the Tuesday after Ascension Sunday, Hubert Nicolai, of Amersford, was invested as a 'Conversus' of our House, aged thirty-five. He was for many years the crier of the city, and was the much loved and faithful friend of the devout Brothers and Sisters in transacting their business. After the death of his wife, and having given portions to his sons, he chose to leave the world, and to serve God humbly in the monastery, and after his probation of nearly three years he was admitted as a 'Conversus.'

In the same year, on the festival of St. James the Apostle, Andreas Hermann, of Sichele, a faithful and devout layman of our House, was translated to God; not having appropriated anything to himself, since he did not leave behind him one penny in secret. When he was twenty-one years of age he came to our monastery on the feast of St. Agnes, A.D. 1419. Thus he completed with us about forty-four years in the service of God, and was translated from this world when he was sixty-five years old. His death was occasioned by his falling suddenly from a horse and being grievously hurt; he commended himself to God, and entered into his rest in much faith and patience, and was buried in the cemetery of the laics.

In A.D. 1464, on the feast of St. Matthew the Apostle, there was a terrible tempest of wind, à Kempis records, which broke many of our trees, uprooting others from the

¹ *Chro Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, T. à Kemp., ch. xxix.

earth. Large ships at sea were also sunk. Moreover in several parts the Roman pestilence raged, and many died who were likely for a long life.

After mentioning the investment of a young cleric, Reyner Koethen, who had good parents and friends in Zwolle, and three sisters in the monastery at Wyton, the chronicler goes on to say: in A.D. 1465, in the month of March, during the season of Lent, God succoured our House by a large capture of fish in the river Vecht, near to the monastery, so that there was not only sufficient for all the community, for the poor, and for strangers, but such a surplus left, that several negotiators came from Westphalia and Saxony to buy the 'springos' fish.

In the same year a new monastery was opened at Zwolle, for the Order of Preachers.

In the same year, in the month of July (21), on the day of St. Praxedis,¹ our beloved Brother Henry Lymborgh, priest, died. He was a native of Zwolle, aged fifty; and was buried in the east passage by the side of Brother Henry Wilhelm, our fourth Prior. He was frequently afflicted with a painful illness, and having completed his twenty-seventh year as a 'religious,' he was attacked at the close of his life with paralysis of the mouth, and now rests in peace among his Brethren.

In the same year, in the month of October, after the feast of St. Michael, John Lyman, a native of Holland, a faithful layman and 'donatus,' died in the night, when in the course of nature he had attained to the age of seventy. He lived humbly among the husbandmen forty-five years. He was for a long time lame in his feet, and after a long endurance of his infirmity he yielded up his spirit in much patience, and was buried in the western portion of the cemetery among other laics.

In the same year, on the day dedicated to the martyr-

¹ St. Praxedis was the daughter of a Roman senator. She was illustrious for her virtues, and employed her riches in relieving the poor and supporting the Church. During the times of persecution she greatly succoured the martyrs, and lived in the constant exercise of fasting, prayer, and watching. The love of God so intensely filled her soul that her life was given to Him.

dom of SS. Crispin and Crispinian¹ (October 25), Bernard Irten died in Zwolle. He was a friend of our monastery, and visited us frequently during his life; and from his devotion to St. Agnes he desired to be buried here, and was consequently interred in the western portion of the cemetery, before the door of the church, with the 'Conversi.'

In the year 1466, in the night of St. Maurus (January 15), Walter Isken, the father of our cellarer Gerlac, died. He was very old—a nonagenarian—and had been sometime ago a husbandman on a certain manor belonging to the Monastery of Windesheim. He was a native of the village of Raelten, and left his friends and acquaintance in old age, and followed his son Gerlac, a faithful 'oblatus.' He lived in our monastery almost eleven years before his death. For a long while before this he came slowly with a staff, though with eager desire, every morning to church to hear mass. After bearing very piously and patiently the infirmities of the body and yielding thanks, he slept in the Lord. And when mass had been celebrated for him he was buried among the laics and others belonging to our House, in the cemetery of the 'Donati.'

In the same year, during the octave of St. Agnes, Master Christianus, priest, died, aged eighty. He was Curé of Ter Heyne, and a special friend of our monastery, who out of devotion chose to have a grave among us, with our Brethren. He was buried in the east passage by the grave of Master Hermann Gruter.

¹ Two famous missionary brothers who suffered martyrdom in France. They came from Rome to preach the Gospel to the heathen, and took up their residence at Soissons. Though nobly born, they, like St. Paul, laboured with their own hands for their support—not in the making of tents, but in making shoes. Hence they are usually regarded as the patron saints of the shoemakers. They were very successful in making many converts; but there were some among the people who were filled with wrath against them and accused them to the Emperor, who ordered them to abjure their faith on pain of death. After enduring much cruel suffering they were slain with the sword, A.D. 287. There is an interesting story told of a confraternity of shoemakers, who many years afterwards devoted themselves to pious labours and a devout life, being animated by the example of these two saints.

In the year 1467, on the third day of March, our gardener Hysbrand, a 'donatus,' died before 'compline.' He had been with us, continues à Kempis, thirty years, and died when he was seventy-two.

In the same year, on SS. Peter and Paul's Day, another of the 'Oblati,' Tideman Mulart, died. He had been with us almost forty-four years, having undertaken many toils. He died in peace also at the age of seventy-two, and was buried in the cemetery of the laics.

In 1467 the Brethren of Windesheim built and enlarged their ancient church. And in the same year, after Whitsuntide, our Father George built a new kitchen for the use of the convent, larger and more durable than the former one, which was old, and had been covered over with reeds and straw, and which had to be removed on account of the danger of fire, and certain inconveniences.

This year also, says à Kempis, by the blessing of God, owing to frequent showers of rain, our orchard yielded a large abundance of fruit, and the fields a rich crop in the time of harvest. Therefore special thanks were offered to God in the mass, and the seven Psalms sung in the choir, for the fine weather we had had.

In the same year there died, on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude, Arnold Nemel, the original proprietor of these lands, and our neighbour. He was a good friend to our monastery, and was buried near the west passage before the door of the church, in the sepulchre of his son.¹

And here I must again speak of Thomas à Kempis, and the special work in which he had all along been engaged. He still loved retirement as of old. The quiet seclusion of his cell was pleasant to him, for it was hallowed by many seasons of sweet and sacred intercourse with his Saviour, and refreshing showers of Divine grace. Here he still carried on his work of writing as time allowed. A calm serenity seemed to possess his soul, and holy and heavenly thoughts would ever and anon stir within him, and raise his affections upwards to God and things above.

¹ *Chron. Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, T. à Kemp. ch. xxix.

He still indulged in moments of devout contemplation, and hearkened to catch the still small voice, speaking to his soul, for he felt more than ever, what other more advanced and perfected souls have done before and since, that the 'true life of man is life within.' One other recreation in which he indulged himself at this period of his life, I gather, was in thoughtfully reading over some good book by himself. A favourite saying of his, and one that he frequently uttered, more especially as years advanced upon him, was, 'I have sought for rest in many things but found it not, except in little corners, and in little books :'¹ intimating hereby where, and how, much peaceful repose and quiet for the soul is to be obtained; that is, not in great and worldly things, but in calm reflection upon truths, which were fully accepted, which he had adopted as living principles and proved to be faithful by experience. For speaking of the character of these little books, Tolensis adds, 'And these are for the most part those sentences which, having been drawn from the writings of the ancients, examined, and certified, we possess from Thomas.' Hence this rest was not to be found in running up and down in the world after this thing or the other, but in retirement; not in great things but in small; not in many and large volumes, but in a few and little books; and not in reading much, but in frequent recollectedness of the spirit and self-entertainment in what he did read. There was accordingly a rough portrait of this venerable man, drawn when ripe in years, probably by one of his contemporaries, with the above sentence engraven on a book, which he had by him. Tolensis, moreover, tells us that this picture of Thomas à Kempis was seen by him, with the said inscription upon it. This would be about a hundred years after the death of the saintly man, and in the same House where he had lived so long, where it was shown as a devout curiosity to such as visited the place. But the above writer adds that it

¹ 'In omnibus requiem quæsi, sed non inveni, nisi in Hoexkens ende Boexkens.' Tolensis, *Vita Thom. à Kemp.*, sec. 12. The latter words are evidently Dutch.

was somewhat defaced and obliterated.¹ Thus, in accordance with the motto, we may apply to him his own words, 'His cell was made to him a Paradise, the Church or choir a Heaven, while the Word of God was his food, and the bread of angels his hidden manna to feed upon.'²

This love of retirement and sacred devotion did not, however, with him sink down into dreamy idleness, or sluggish inactivity; it was a principle of life with him, which he seems to have carried out to the end of his days, to be always usefully occupied, and to change from one employment to another as soon as, or even before, signs of weariness appeared. He had been well instructed in the science of life by those who had gone before, and he knew that to maintain a healthy vigour, even in his religious exercises, he must resolutely in due time turn to exterior labours, and the claims which others had upon him. From prayer therefore he would turn to writing, and from sacred contemplation he would pass to the outward duties of his calling, and from intercourse with God to hold suitable intercourse with his fellow-men. This begot in him a calm and thoughtful, yet cheerful and peaceful, demeanour; and his converse with men bore traces of the high communion he held with Jesus in private. Yet, though always occupied, he never seemed in haste, or suffered himself to be worried with the little provocations or untoward events which happened, but appeared to take all things as from the hand of God, and to do all in the conscious endeavour to please Him. His time was thus never wasted, and yet he avoided crowding too many things into a little space, so that in whatever he did he could give his whole mind to it, and do it with all his might. He had leisure to wait heartily upon God; leisure to attend faithfully to the necessity of his fellow-men; and leisure earnestly to look after himself and his own salvation. Hence his cultivation of the interior life did not

¹ 'Ostenditur adhuc ejus Effigies, sed admodum deformata, peneque oblitterata, cum hoc insigni symbolo: In omnibus,' &c. Tolens., *Vita Kemp.*

² *De Discipl. Claust.*

make him unmindful of, or indispose him to enter vigorously and mindfully into the outward business of his life and the claims which others had upon him. We have seen in a former chapter how willingly and earnestly he conversed with others upon holy things for their welfare, and especially with the young men under his charge, training them for a godly life. In addition to this we find him writing letters to those who were at a distance, who had in any measure been brought under his influence, and to whom he thought he might do good. There are several of these to be found in his works. I shall here, therefore, select two or three of them for the reader, which will serve as specimens, and help to give him a general idea of the letter-writing of à Kempis. They differ somewhat from the style of modern letters, but, as might be expected from this devout follower of Christ, he is ever anxious for the glory of God, and the saving health of the persons whom he addresses, while he does not fail to make many suitable and just remarks.

The following letter was written to a member of the same Brotherhood, who had been indiscreet, or had in some measure fallen into trouble, and whom à Kempis was desirous of recovering, that he might establish him in the fear of God.

My Brother, beloved in Christ,—You see how cautiously you ought to walk, since the days are evil. Great caution should be observed by a servant of God in all his words and works. For whosoever doth not exercise some forethought in his affairs, will very soon either receive or do some hurt. And whoever in the beginning has been either negligent or rash, will feel great loss in the end. That a man be not without counsel it is needful, before he undertake any matter, that he should for a good while thoroughly weigh it over, and have frequent recourse to the secret habitation of his heart, lest he be as one of those foolish and provoking ones, who do not lift up their hearts to God.

Wherefore let your eye go before all your actions, and do everything with foresight. Do not busy yourself with other men's matters and neglect yourself; because no man is wiser than he whose soul is always in his own hands. A man cannot have a

dearer treasure or a better substance upon earth, if he well considers it, than his own soul. He ought therefore to watch, and always to be taking care of his soul, because nothing can be compared with the salvation of it.

Now the salvation thereof consists in true righteousness ; and true righteousness holds in abomination every kind of wickedness. The more anyone strives against vice, the nearer will he approach to virtue. The more he delights in virtue, so much the more will he detest what is contrary to it. An apprehension of vices conduces much to the overcoming them. Many do not in truth know their own defects ; and some, although they know them, do not sufficiently consider the evil of them, or, if they do consider, very soon turn away their eyes, and endeavour to forget what they would not otherwise tolerate.

You must not do so, most beloved Brother, but must continually resist all unrighteousness and iniquity, be ever seeking after a remedy, and earnestly imploring help from God. But chiefly ought you to oppose the motions of your passions at the beginning of the combat ; because if the battle waxes hotter where wilt thou be, frail man ? Out of a small matter grievous disquietude will arise, and from one word many words do spring ; so also from a little laughter, dissolution on a large scale oftentimes breaks forth.¹ A little affront engenders in foolish and inconsiderate men a difficult ending and a grievous wound.

He then acts well and wisely who, not regarding other people, keepeth himself, judgeth himself, and ordereth himself as he ought. For the more one is prone to consider others, the more indisposed he is to look to himself. Would you have peace, then learn to dwell in Sion.² For it is advantageous to a man who cannot find rest in this world to flee unto God, and to desire to be with

¹ We notice here again how much this counsel is in accordance with what we find in the *De Imitatione*, where it says : ‘ We must be especially watchful against temptation in the beginning, for the enemy is more easily overcome if he be not suffered to enter the door of our hearts, but be resisted at the very gate on his first knocking. Wherefore one said, “ Withstand the beginnings,” ’ &c. Book i. chap. xiii.

² This expression seems to have reference to that remarkable passage in Isaiah, to which St. Peter thus alludes, ‘ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.’ And the impression which Thomas would leave is this : that instead of taking refuge in lies, and in the false securities that the world offers, to which the Prophet previously alludes, his friend to whom he writes should learn to trust in the promises of God, generally, and particularly in Him who has become the chief corner stone of the spiritual Sion.

Christ, since there is none other that fighteth for us, except He Who made us.

When you feel evil passions rising up within you, oppose thereto those remedies which you know to be useful to you, and think frequently upon what you have heard, and see whether they may not be serviceable to you. And since we are daily tempted, the battle must daily be carried on against it. He is not, however, overcome who is often sensible of a rebellious passion. Nevertheless he ought to be grieved, because so much evil as yet lives within him, and that he is not yet perfectly dead to himself.

A man may often be overthrown, but he ought always to take fresh courage. Especially must he resolve to act with greater vigour against those vices which most molest him, and most frequently beset him. For sometimes anger, sometimes pride, and at other times lust, trouble and vehemently inflame the heart of man. But when this is so, with the shield of prayer, contrition of heart, and by calling upon the holy name Jesus, you must look steadfastly unto heaven, whence all help comes. And you must pray after this manner, or the like :—‘O gracious Jesu, succour me at this present time. Ah, Lord God, help me ! What shall I, a poor wretch, do without Thee ? How shall I begin, and after what manner shall I put an end to this, O my God ?’

You know well what is most necessary for you, because daily molestations not only teach you this, but teach you how to escape : and the unction of the Holy Spirit will teach you. Here then you must seek help and counsel, and from Him you must seek that refreshment of the heart so much needed. Consider with yourself what you seek for in your works ; what it is you love, and what you do not love. For according to his affections, so is a man either stable or unsteady. How can he who covets much, and desires to have many things, abide in himself ? He is driven about by every wind of heaven, and is taken captive in the snare of his earthly desires.

It is frequently but a small thing, for the obtaining of which a man is brought into great perplexity. But he who expels all things from himself, suffering everything to stand in its place as he finds it, will abide in great peace. In truth, he who intermeddles in many things, and is for ordering and having a hand in every business, is in danger of even hurting and destroying himself. And because he would be a master in other men’s affairs, it is not to be wondered at, that he hardly knows as much as a scholar doth in his own. O how many things he has yet to learn, which he sees not ! How very deficient he yet is, and O how far he is

from the mark ! Why then does he busy himself so much about other persons, and with what he cannot amend ? Or why does he implicate himself in such things as do not at all belong to him ?

You inquire, however, what is that which doth trouble me ? It is that you consider yourself, and cast everything else far from you. In this consideration you will both find and keep yourself, and will make great progress. You will be free from suspicion and displeasure. You will be less solicitous about the transaction of things exterior, and the ordering of those in the House where you dwell.

Beloved Brother, may the Lord keep you from all evil, may the Lord preserve your soul. Amen.¹

A letter has sometimes more influence with one whom you desire to help and influence for good than a set discourse. The person addressed feels that you have yourself given some thought to him, and are interested about him ; and, on the other hand, he is drawn to think for himself, and can more deliberately consider what you have said ; it keeps up a bond between you, which might otherwise be lost sight of when separated from one another. Of this means of doing good Thomas à Kempis frequently availed himself.

Here is another letter written to a well-disposed friend about the Hidden Manna, as an encouragement for him to advance in the spiritual life. It is rather a long one, but it contains many precious words of spiritual counsel, and was much valued by the Brothers of Common Life at St. Agnes, into whose hands it afterwards came, and it is here given without abridgment and without comment. The person addressed had evidently suffered long from grievous calumny, and while smarting under, what he thought, unjust charges, had given way to angry passion, and had in other ways offended ; he had in fact been neglecting the interior life, and lost much of his peace of mind. But, conscious of these things, he deeply bewailed his sad failures, so much so, that he began to despair of ever overcoming his infirmities and besetting sin. He had

¹ *Epistola Secunda, Tom. Tert. Opera Omnia*, Thom. à Kemp. pp. 170, 171.

either consulted Thomas, or Thomas had by some means been informed of his state, and become interested in his welfare, the result of which was the present letter. And it is worth while observing the method of dealing with such an one, and the arguments Thomas uses to reanimate him with the hope of overcoming. The very text of Scripture on which he founds his counsel is an encouragement. With great skill he brings out the promise of the hidden manna, the person to whom it is promised, and how it is to be attained. He faithfully considers the nature of the case, the remedies to be applied, and the prospect of successfully overcoming; but here is the letter:—

Dearest Brother,—I willingly divide with you whatever good the Lord may at any time impart to His poor servant. I am poor and a beggar; but I hope the Lord will be solicitous of me, and of thee likewise. Whence I beseech His clemency, that there may be one common alms to us both from the bounty of His table.

To-day the Lord came to meet His beggar, with the most sweet bread of heaven. A discourse exceedingly savoury and gracious was poured into mine ears. A lesson out of the Book of the Revelation of St. John was read aloud.¹ But from the multitude of such great mysteries, only one short versicle was retained by me. I was not sufficient of myself to take in more, for the revelations are not few which sound obscurely.

It was the Lord's gift that something both concise and savoury should be communicated, whereby the affections might be attracted. O that He would give light and grace that this may be open to the understanding. Because, however plain it may seem to the spiritual, yet to them that are carnal it lies hid.

It is my desire, therefore, that you should participate with me in this gift. For then are we truly inseparable companions, when in Christ we delight in one thing, seek for one thing, and aim at one thing.

And now apply your ears, and listen diligently to that which sounds so exceedingly sweet. The Word saith, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. To him

¹ It is evident from what follows that Thomas had been listening, and now refers, to the second chapter of the Revelation, in which are the letters sent from our Lord, and dictated by the Spirit to the chief ministers of the Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos and Thyatira.

that overcometh will I give to eat of the Hidden Manna ; and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.' ¹

Hearest thou now, my Brother, the heavenly voice? O that it might reach also to the internal hearing of our hearts, that we might feel the might of its virtue. It is a living saying, and worthy of all acceptation! O how heavenly is that voice which speaks of nothing earthly, which though not received by the flesh, let the spirit understand, since this entire saying is altogether full of what the spirit needs. Christ saith, 'The words that I speak unto you are Spirit and they are Life! Now it is the Spirit Who quickens, the flesh profiteth nothing.'

The outward, carnal, natural man, he also who is lifted up in himself, is not able, therefore, to understand the secrets of Divine Revelation ; as St. Paul attests, who says, the natural, or animal man,² receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.³

The Holy Spirit, therefore, here speaketh to spiritual persons, who by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, who have an aversion for the world, and who repel with disdain the malignant counsels of the devil. For such as these who have received the firstfruits of the Spirit, cannot be ignorant of what this Hidden Manna is ; for by tasting, rather than by reading or hearing, they have learnt what it is.

Now this Manna is given to the beloved Children, who serving the Father out of filial love, study to be always doing His will, and advancing His glory. And if you are not averse to receive what I offer, know that the Manna here promised describes the interior sweetness of the mind, or the consolation of the Saints in this life.

A very congruous sense may therefore be given to the passage, 'To him that overcometh will I give the Hidden Manna ;' viz. to him that despiseth carnal consolation, will I give that which is spiritual ; to him that rejecteth earthly and outward goods, will I give the heavenly and inward, even the gifts of the Spirit, which by their intrinsic merit do infinitely exceed all other delectations. Which also are of such a nature, and so vast, that no man is ever worthy to know it, unless he has first learnt to look with contempt on all vain and sordid solacements : for it is written, 'A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand.'

But as it behoves every one boldly to contend against vice,

¹ Rev. ii. 17.

² 'Animalis.'

³ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

and to overcome every evil habit, I shall here dilate somewhat upon this mystical passage. For as formerly in the desert God rained down Manna from heaven on the Children of Israel, so in like manner doth He now pour down upon His spiritual Children the grace of Internal Consolation, to fortify them thereby against temptations.

The Israelites were nourished with this food as long as they were in the wilderness, even till they arrived at the land of promise ; and as long as the Elect are sojourners in the world, so long are they nourished with the Bread of Life and understanding, till the body being laid low, they enter the land of the Living.

Moreover, when the people of Israel began to eat of the fruit of that land, presently the Manna failed ; and so when the Saints shall be taken up into the glory of blessedness, they will not need to be refreshed after our manner, with spiritual aliment.

Nevertheless it is One Bread, which feeds angels and men ; souls in glory, and the travellers in grace.

But that which moveth me not a little is, that many complain that this Manna fails them ; and also, that many who have been accustomed to be refreshed therewith have lost the savour of it. What other cause is there for this aridity, and this insipidness of your mouth, but that you have returned again to the weak and beggarly solacements of the world ?

Remember your going forth out of Egypt. Let this Day be unto you for a memorial of the Lord's name, for an everlasting remembrance. There was no doubt but that the Lord was with you, otherwise you would yet have been in the world. Where is then that spirit, that primitive fervour, that firm intention, that unmoveable resolution, that love strong as death ?

After a certain manner ye are equipped for your departure from the world, while with a constant soul ye are willing to endure all things—things adverse, vile, and bitter. And moreover ye have come with gladness to Horeb the Mount of God, to the hearing of the law of life and discipline, while ye willingly listen to the admonitions of the Senior Brethren, and resolve to live religiously according to them.

How is it that you are now weary of your journey ? Why sit you down so heavy and full of complaint, as sinking under your burden ? Whereas you ought, for the time and years that you have been travelling, to have been able to present to others of the fruit of the land of promise, and to give them a taste of the grapes and the pomegranates ; and behold, even Manna is wanting unto you.

Turn again, ye backsliding children ; for though ye have not in body turned back to the world, still in heart ye have again become entangled with the sundry desires of earthly things. Oh what sorrow ! that there are so many who spiritually go forth out of Egypt, pass the Red Sea, walk through the desert, bear the tabernacle and its vessels, yet enter not into the land of promise.

Almost all things happen to them which happened aforetime to the Children of Israel, who murmuring against Moses, grieved because they had been led out of Egypt. For so in like manner there are very many found at this day, who leave the world, forsake parents and friends, bewail their past sins, abominate carnal desires, and propose to themselves a perfect rule of righteousness.

They behold the life of a crucified Christ, and bear the yoke of the Lord in obedience and self-denial ; so that all things are prepared, and they themselves are, for a time, fervent with respect to labours and abstinence, meek under reproofs, humble under affronts, patient under corrections, and most constant under adversities and indignities ; and yet they do not all hold out to the end in the same fervour.

For awhile after their departure, that is, from the time of their conversion being effected, they grow less cautious and solicitous concerning their advancement, and fall into various temptations, and into sicknesses of the passions ; so that some of them are troubled that they ever begun, and some even deliberate and contrive how they may turn back again.

But there are others also who seem to remain steadfast, and yet after a certain time, and from custom, they come to go round like asses in a mill, because they have so little devotion and affection in those things which they have learned to perform, and all things feel to be hard and laborious, because they have no Manna.

The heavens seem to them to be of brass and the earth of iron, because they know neither how to contemplate heavenly things, nor how to till the field of their heart with virtues and devout exercises.

Yet they say, that they would gladly be devout, that they would be pleased to have the Christian virtues, that they would willingly overcome their carnal passions and desires : but it is not enough to be willing to do well, while the hand and endeavour be wanting. It is needful that you labour, that you put force upon nature, as the Lord hath said, 'The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence,

and the violent take it by force.' Now violence is hard work ; and you know that the Saints have not with idleness and sleep obtained an entrance into the kingdom of God.

How long loiter ye then, and why do ye not arm yourselves against your passions ; that ye may obtain the heavenly virtues, and be found worthy to receive spiritual consolations ? By how much the longer ye loiter, so much the worse will it be with you ; and without labour and pains you will never arrive at the wished-for rest. 'Ask and it shall be given you ; seek and ye shall find ; knock and it shall be opened unto you.'

Slothfulness and negligence hold you fast ; but against these you must in the first place gird yourselves up, and fight the battles of the Lord. Why do you so much neglect your own advancement ? Certainly the labour will be good for you, and it will be for your peace. It is written, 'I have laboured a little, I have found much rest.'¹

But perhaps you will answer, Who is there that is able always to be combating the vices and passions ? It seems to us the conflicts are so many and almost insuperable ; who can endure so great vexation ?

Hear, O ye credulous and ye rebellious ! ye effeminate soldiers and slothful servants ! Ye regard the labour, ye consider the fight, but why do ye not think of the reward and the victory ? And what is all labour in comparison of Eternal rest ? and what is a short exercise in consideration of the consolation of a good conscience ?

O if ye would but begin in earnest, and manfully and thoroughly purpose, and choose either to conquer or die, assuredly ye would by the help of God feel that to be easy which ye now think to be insuperable. Scarcely is any one found to be so vicious, to whom the good virtues have been denied, after diligence and perseverance.

It may seem a laborious business to you to overcome your passions, but unless these be subdued, you will never have true rest of heart. And when others are with God in devotion and great peace, then you will have sorrow, oppression, and wearisomeness from within and from without. Never will you be secure, never will you have true joy, unless you mortify your fleshly desires.

And if the religiousness of the saints, and the devotion of very many do not draw you, let the fear of Divine vengeance be of some avail to awaken you out of your miserable indifference, which saith, 'I will heap mischief upon them.' 'I will spend My

¹ Ecclesiasticus li. 27.

sharp arrows upon them. They shall be consumed with hunger, they shall be devoured with burning coals, and with bitter destruction.'

These versicles, indeed, sound very terrible; and would to God they might prevail to convert the old nature within you! that being renewed and fervently affected, you might daily become better, more alert to the things of God, laying hold of the promise of the Holy Ghost, Who saith, 'To him that overcometh will I give the Hidden Manna.'

If ye are willing and will hearken unto me, ye shall eat the good of the land. There shall spring up unto you, instead of the thorn, a most beautiful rose, and instead of the thistle, a most fair white lily. These are great things, so also are they most sweet and comfortable, to such as have a mind to be proficient.

Be not therefore disheartened, O man of God; let not the multitude of your failings cast you down. Believe God, and hope in Him; and thou shalt be a better *overcomer* than thou hast hitherto been: the Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.

Understandest thou this? The Lord Himself will give you fortitude, yea, He will give you strength to resist wrath, to shake off sloth, and to restrain consent to the lusting mind. And thou shalt hold thy peace; inasmuch as thou shalt not ascribe this power to thyself, neither shalt thou elevate thyself on account of this; but thou shalt attribute all purely to God, Who standeth at the right hand of the poor.

And thou shalt the more surely prevail, when thou hidest thyself from men, and confessest that thou art none otherwise than infirm and needy. And if any one should rise up against thee, and say things that thou dislikest to hear, be patient, and hold thy peace; God will answer the evil that is said against thee.

In what can the malice of another hurt thee, if he be puffed up against thee, if he detract from thee, if he rail at thee? He doth but the more betray himself by this, that he is not a good man. Since if thou art godly, and shalt abide in patience, he hath done thee no mischief, but hath rather increased thy reward in heaven. For in the sight of the wise, thou art the brighter for reproach, and the more approved for the virtue of thy patience.

For the ill-nature of another none is the worse: a contumelious word hurts none, so long as the injured person is truly pious, and not moved by it. Such as every man is *inwardly*, such will his outward adversity be to him. For if thou art good, simple, and upright, and art by trials approved to be a person fearing God,

none can ever take from thee thy goodness, righteousness, and peace.

That patience, however, is not great, which a little matter can upset. Learn at least to hold thy peace when injured ; for it is the part of a prudent person to hold his peace in an evil time. He who desireth to overcome, let him deliver himself up as one that is overcome.

Think of the crown, not of the injury ; and consider rather how thou canst heal such an one as withstandeth thee unjustly, and not, on the contrary, how thou canst, as if moved by a zeal of justice, return him an answer.

For if he will not forgive, yet do thou forgive ; for he most frequently commits the greater fault who is angry with another, than he who meekly bears with him who is angry.

It is the nature of the miserable to be frequently complaining ; and of the impatient to be soon disturbed, and to cast the cause upon others. Be thou, therefore, content to be as a person accused, even though thou mayest be innocent before God.

Begin first with thyself, so shalt thou be able to heal another. Nevertheless, let him who hath a zeal against the faults of another, and who is moved with indignation if anything be done against righteousness, give ear.

How rightly and prudently wouldest thou do, to exercise thy zeal against thine own agitation, and first to amend in thine own self, what thou reprehendest in another.

When, therefore, thou art angry at the faults of others, what profit will it be to thee to take the mote out of thy brother's eye, and dost not restrain the motions of thine own impatience?

Seemeth his fault to thee not a mote, but rather a beam? Look, lest peradventure thou, out of thine own judgment, suspiciously takest that for a beam, which in God's sight, perhaps, is hardly counted as a mote. Trust not too much herein to thine own judgment ; for thou art man, and not God.

Nevertheless, whether it be great, or whether it be small, it will always be more useful for thee to consider thine own self ; because thou also art a sinner, and hast need of a cure. Wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself, since thou doest the same thing.

Moreover, what doth it profit me, if I shall heal any one by my words, and shall still myself abide in my passions? Well indeed is it for him, to whom my evil constructions turn for good, but woe to me, the destroyer of my own salvation.

It is no sign of a meek and gentle heart, either inconsiderately

to reprove any one, or in reproving to exceed the due measure ; or not to be able to refrain his spirit, or not to defer censuring, till wrath cools by degrees into mildness, and bitter zeal returns back to gentleness.

Perhaps thou wilt then find him whom thou reprehendest, not to have been guilty of so great a fault as thou didst imagine ; and thou wilt the rather be apt to excuse him against whom thou wast at first surprised into indignation.

Also thou wilt not unfitly impute it to thine own malice, or ill-nature, that thou wast not able to endure such a slight occasion of injury ; likewise thou wilt the more bewail thy unjust reproof, than his fault.

Be ashamed then, that thou, who daily desirest thine own infirmity to be overlooked by others, hast not yet learnt to tolerate the small defects of a Brother. Why, therefore, shewest thou not the same mercy to another, which thou desirest should be given to thyself ?

Return to thyself, and fear greatly, lest thou do more grievously offend by being passionate, and by taking an ill part ; than thy Brother doth by what he has done amiss.

It may be that as soon as he recognised his fall, he bewailed it, and for the future proposed to take heed ; but thou being impatient and without compassion, hast neither bewailed nor so much as looked into thy sin.

Hitherto he may have stood well enough with thee, through the love which is in his heart, and may think no ill of thee ; but rather humbled himself, and justified thee before himself.

Take heed then, lest he who seemeth to thee a sinner, go before thee into the kingdom of God ; and thou, with the presumption of righteousness, become like the proud Pharisee, who was reprobated by the Lord for his pride, as he stood opposed to the humility of the Publican.

Behold, thou hast heard now, in some measure, most dear friend, how you are to overcome yourself, and how you are to exercise your zeal against your own vices. Study more and more, therefore, to make proficiency, and to be continually lopping off something of vicious custom and evil habit.

But as negligence is apt to nourish vice, and to let go virtue ; so diligence, assisted by Divine Grace, doth drive out and overcome the most inveterate evils.

For though much labour be necessary in the beginning of the battle, yet when you see how little by little your enemies fall before you, you will be greatly comforted concerning a prosperous end. It

hindereth us mightily, that we are so much afraid to offer violence to nature.

O what great labours men undergo for earthly gains, and shall we flag in the pursuit of Eternal goods? The mariner goes to sea, the merchant compasses distant countries, the soldier bears arms, the countryman plows his ground; and without labour and pains these persons can neither acquire riches nor honour. Why then should we think that virtues are to be gotten without great solicitude?

To begin something to-day, and to add a little to it to-morrow, and so every day successively to add virtue to virtue, and to join resolution to resolution, will in the end make a man thoroughly virtuous, devout, pure, holy, and spiritual, dear to God and agreeable to men.

By this method a man may come to obtain the New Name, which is included in the White Stone, for by trampling his vices underfoot, he is rendered pure and white internally; and so is sooner admitted to enjoy the consolations of supernal sweetness, which remains unknown to the carnal and the lukewarm.

Let us, therefore, with a diligent mind ruminate upon the present versicle against detestable slothfulness, thereby to fire ourselves and our Brethren with the love of the spiritual life; that so we may be healed of our vices, and the gifts of heavenly virtues may be continually increased in us.

For be assured that the Holy Ghost will not defraud His faithful warriors of their expectation, who, that they may contend valiantly, hath with an encouraging voice from heaven trumpeted forth these words: 'To him that overcometh will I give the Hidden Manna.'¹

But another more prominent duty which à Kempis discharged, was that of *Preaching*. He does not seem to have had the fire and burning eloquence of Gerard, the founder of the Brotherhood, or of such as seem to storm the proud citadel of man's heart, and bring it low; neither had his preaching the point and piquancy of the more learned. His manner would appear to have been one of calm reverence, as if speaking fresh from the presence of God to man, and out of a full heart; which had a solemnity and softened fervency, which told upon men, and inclined them to listen to him. When asked to preach for the good of others

¹ *Epistola Prima, Tom. Tert., Opera Thom. à Kemp.* pp. 165-170.

he never, or very rarely refused. And usually preached without MS., the which, however, he did not do without having some time for previous meditation, and even a little sleep, did he feel weary. Very many flocked to hear him from the cities and more remote places, who had heard of his fame and desired to listen to him.¹ He also gave, when Sub-prior, and probably afterwards when one of the senior Brothers, regular addresses prepared with great care. In his works are to be found three series of *Sermones* and *Collationes* from his pen, for the special use of the *Novices*; and one series addressed *ad Fratres*; as well as *Conciones*, which were mostly designed for Church festivals; these, as it has been said, 'he wrote in clear and flowing diction, and with rich applications to life, impressively propounding the doctrine of his practical and devotional mysticism.' Those delivered to the Brethren are without a text, save the first; and may be regarded more in the light of lectures, and are somewhat after the style of the many various little treatises which he has written. These addresses, or lectures, treat upon the principal subjects of their profession, as The Abnegation of Self, and the Contempt of Earthly Consolations; The Consolation of the Soul in God; The two-fold Compunction of the Soul for the Heavenly Country; The Precious Pearl of Chastity; On Opposing Temptations; The benefit of Solitude drawn from the example of Christ and the Holy Fathers; The Fruit of Silence; and The Internal Quietness of the Heart, lifting up the soul above itself to Christ. These addresses, or lectures, are considered genuine, and so also are the first two parts, or series, to the Novices; but some doubt is thrown upon the third part. Upon this question, however, it is not needful here to enter; I would rather give the reader an idea of the style and matter of his sermons. I shall therefore quote some portions of one to the young men formerly under his charge, 'On the Concord of Brethren, and the Melody of Divine Praise.' The short interesting prologue to these sermons has been given in a previous chapter.²

¹ Franc. Tolensis, *Vita Thom. à Kemp.* sec. 10.

² See II. chap. xx. p. 119.

The text with which he begins the sermon alluded to is :—

*‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity.’*¹

1. The holy David, and truly a great prophet before the Lord, filled with the Holy Spirit, has published many Psalms : some of prayer for help in trouble, some of thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies ; but seldom or never has he published so good and joyful a harmony as he has expressed in this brief canticle of degrees, saying, ‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity.’ For all men naturally seek after what is good and pleasant, and truly shun evil and sorrow, and the unhappiness of man. Therefore rejoicing to speak of brotherly love and unanimity, while other good men present were silent, he particularly rejoiced in the devotion of the brethren ; and having with gladness taken up his psalter with the harp, he sung in the house of the Lord, saying, ‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.’

2. Truly, Brethren, no greater pleasure exists in a Monastery of religious persons, and in a Congregation of Brothers and Sisters, than a concord of minds and a harmony of manners, with an observance of the rules and statutes, according to the decrees of the Prelate,² and the admonitions of the elder Brethren. But this concord of Brethren, holy and pleasing to God, the Devil—the enemy of all good—does not cease to oppose and destroy ; preparing snares in various ways, by night and by day, to deceive slothful and unsettled souls ; at one time openly he troubles them by vain words ; at another secretly by base suggestions he tempts and disquiets them, if he can by any means recall a new soldier of Christ from his holy purpose, or draw away an old disciple into sloth, or force a weak one into murmuring, or bind a passionate one in obstinacy.

But against all these wiles and terrors of Satan, a united community of many Brethren strive and triumph ; for they watch in the nocturnal vigils, apply themselves vigorously to daily labours, give attentive heed to sacred readings ; and, persevering in devout prayers, and in the melodies of the Psalms, they rejoice in God, and, as if with celestial trumpets sounding together, they put the Devil to flight. For they greatly afflict him when they fast ; they beat him when they undergo discipline ; they tread on him when they seek pardon ; they oppress him when they humble them-

¹ Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

² For so the Priors are frequently called.

selves ; they frighten him when they invoke the name of Jesus ; they torture him when they mention Mary ; they put him to flight when they sign themselves with the cross ; they burn him when they adore the Crucified One ; they conquer him when they obey ; they imprison him when they remain in solitude ; they bind him when they strictly observe silence.

3. Truly this is a holy assembly of Brethren, seeking the Lord, seeking the face of the God of Jacob, despising the world, loving Christ, denying themselves, and all things for the sake of God, contending against the Devil and his army until he retreat, and will not so soon again presume to return to the camp of God. Consider, therefore, well, most dear ones, how good and pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity : because, assembled together in one House, bound together by the profession of the same rule, well governed under one Prelate, they rise together to their vigils, they assemble together at the canonical hours, they begin to sing and read together, alike striving to perform honourably the Divine service. O how agreeable and commendable a Society, dedicated chiefly to the praise of God ; where there are so many resounding trumpets, so many voices cheerfully singing in concert.

À Kempis then goes on to say, that the devils, seeing such a devout and holy community, acknowledge that God is also fighting for these servants of His against them, and take their departure ; he bids his auditors remember that they have been clothed in the vestments of holy religion, dedicated to God for ever, and having begun to fight bravely, they must ever stand firm, armed with prayers against the adversaries of their salvation, dreading the attacks of none, but trusting in God ; they must render thanks for the benefits heaped upon them : they must not think their sacred duties irksome, but cast off torpor, and all wandering and carnal thoughts : and then he continues :—

5. O most dear Brethren, bear in mind the presence of Christ, the guardianship of angels, the reverence due to the Sacrament, and to the relics of the saints, in whose sight you stand and sing, although with your bodily eyes you see them not. Diligently guard against vain phantasies and unclean spirits, lest they find a place of entering, and lie hid within you. Quickly turn away your face from the proffers of the Devil ; sign your hearts with the

sign of the holy Cross ; run again to the passion of Christ ; blush to think of things other than the words of God, which you are reading and singing. Begin now to spend an unwearied life with the angels ; to preserve peace and concord with all ; giving no occasion of scandal to any, by offensive words or actions.

For the love of Christ bear the imperfections of the weak, yet do not consent to their vices, or their complainings. Pray frequently for the troubled and tempted ; fear lest similar things should happen to you, or lest you incur even worse things. But exhibit to all an example of true humility, of gentleness, of patience, of silence, and of obedience ; that you may receive in heaven an everlasting reward from God, with His saints and elect. For if you would experience the least joy, you should together fly to all those things which are pleasing to God ; and should hasten to the choir, where Divine and heavenly things are discoursed upon by day and night.

When, however, you feel fatigue from the burden of labour, call to remembrance the Eternal rewards promised to you in heaven. Wherefore the blessed Paul, who laboured more than all, while inciting the slothful and comforting the weak, would have them recall to their minds heavenly things during their labours, saying, ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the future glory that shall be revealed in us.’¹ Never can the servant of God be overcome in the contest, nor weighed down with the labour of temporal things, who always bears in mind Eternal good and evil. He, therefore, who desires to possess a pure and quiet heart, should exclude from himself all temporal profit and human comfort. For heavenly desire, acquired in silence, is soon lost, unless it be guarded with all diligence from external rumours.

The venerable Father then alluding to the counterfeit or insincere monk, intimates that the monastery is no place for him, and that it will be to him like the troubled sea, which cannot retain in itself dead bodies, but must forthwith cast them out ; while it will nourish the healthy and living, and contribute to their improvement : and then he shows how the carnal man will not long lie concealed, but will in various ways manifest the evil that is in him : and proceeding with the last division of his sermon, says :—

¹ Rom. viii. 18.

7. In the Congregation of the devotees the hearts of many are tried, as gold in a hot furnace, whether their desires are conceived of God, or of the flesh. For they who seek their own advantage only, and negligently pass over the common labours and observances of their Order, these make but little progress in spirit, but declining towards external things, frequently lapse to their former vices. For how can any one persevere for long in discipline and devotion, who does not manfully fight against temptations and evil passions? Wherefore, as long as little vices lie hid, remedies must be used in season, lest the growing nettles choke the good seed. For the Saviour saith of certain false and lukewarm Brethren, in whom there is no spiritual fervour, and where the humble garb appears outwardly only, with an affection of honour, 'Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.'¹

And truly, he who does not build his house upon a firm rock, i.e. his life upon CHRIST, and in true humility, will, when the winds of haughtiness blow, fall from his state of devotion to external occupations merely, and into various temptations of the Devil. From which evils, may Jesus Christ, the Son of God, graciously preserve us, Who has taught us by His word and example to walk humbly, and always to live in peace with the Brethren, without hypocrisy and without corruption. Amen.²

There are none of the examples or illustrations, alluded to in his prologue, attached to this sermon; but at the close of some of the other sermons he gives several anecdotes to enforce, enliven, and elucidate what he has said. They are all of a simple character, but a few of them will be adduced before closing this chapter, as they show his readiness in turning to account what happened among them. Here is one very apposite to the sermon which has just been given :—

Two Brethren once came to the house of a certain nobleman and territorial chief, for the sake of some Monastic service. The honourable chief, looking attentively at them then, considered well the outward dress and manners of them both. And upon their going away the sagacious man said to his wife in private—not speaking of it openly to any one, 'It seems to me that one of those two has either lately arrived there, or wishes soon to withdraw thence.' To whom the wife said, wondering, 'How do you

¹ St. Matt. xv. 13.

² Sermo primus ad Novitios.

know this?' He replied, 'From the dissimilarity of their dress and bearing, and from their words and manners, I conjecture a difference in their way of living.' After a short time, then, the hidden matter openly appeared.¹

Here is another anecdote of a sad defection from the Brotherhood, and falling into the terrible snare of the devil; which must have had a solemn warning for those who remained :—

A certain devotee, sorely tempted by the Devil, went out from the Congregation of the Brethren, to obtain the solaces of the world in vain amusements. Having then left the humble community of the Clerics, he frequently associated with companies of the laity. And on a certain day, going out of the gate of the city, he began to play with his companions for money; and playing a long time he lost a sum of money; ² and what is worse, the reputation of a good conscience. The game at pyramids being at length finished, he was urged to pay his debts without further delay. He then by base subterfuges refused to deliver up his money; he fights vigorously, he endeavours to run away, he objects to pay anything willingly. The players becoming excited, and rallying round him, cry out against the perfidious debtor, like ravenous dogs against a wolf; they lay hold of him, strike him with their hands and curse him with words, saying, 'Give up, you scoundrel, what you owe.' But still he would not agree with his exactors, and they, becoming exceedingly angry, gave him many hard blows for a few pence. At length, having revived again, he is brought back to the town by certain persons. Then he sent word to his devout Brethren—countrymen of his—entreating them with many prayers to visit him, now greatly oppressed with weaknesses, that he might relate to them the history of his wretched sufferings. For the lute of worldly frivolity was now turned into lamentations of bitterest affliction. The kind Brethren, hearing these things, visit the sick man, and compassionating his afflicted soul, they seriously blame the erring one for his admitted wickedness, saying that the blows he had received were just. 'For if,' say they, 'you had remained in the community, you would not have received so many wounds.' Then, sorrowing much, he confessed that he had acted foolishly and had sinned. 'Therefore if I recover,' he said, 'I resolve, by the favour of God, to amend.' And many of the Brethren hearing of these misfortunes were seized with fear, became more constant, and made greater progress.³

¹ Sermo ii. 'De laude bonæ congregationis,' sec. 5.

² 'Taxam.'

³ *Ibid.* sec. 6.

Here is a third anecdote told by Thomas à Kempis illustrating the value of intercessory prayer :—

A certain pious Brother of our house intending to celebrate mass, previously visited another Brother out of charity who was grievously ill. The sick man, therefore, entreated him to pray earnestly to the Lord for him in the mass ; that if it pleased God, he might be again restored to health. The priest, then moved with compassion, and desiring most affectionately and at once to comply with this work of love, prayed the merciful Lord for the Brother's recovery. When the mass was fully concluded, he immediately went again to visit the sick Brother, and asked him how it was with him. The sick Brother replied, 'Thanks be unto God, I feel that I am much better by virtue of the mass, which out of charity thou hast read for me to-day.' After a few days, the Brother that was sick recovered his health. This circumstance left so strong an impression upon his mind, that from that time he became more and more zealous in his devotions and pious studies, and at length, after some years, was raised to the office of Prior.¹

This would probably be Henry of Deventer or Prior George, to whom Thomas à Kempis alludes in his *Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes* ; and as Thomas occasionally speaks of himself in the third person, it has been suggested that the other Brother who prayed for him was Thomas himself.

Here is what is called 'an example of Patience,' or what was said, by one who had travelled much, concerning its rarity, and yet its desirableness. The Brother is probably Thomas himself. The account is given at the close of one of his sermons to the Novices :—

One of the Brothers asked a certain stranger, coming from far, saying, 'Tell me, my friend, what good thing you have heard and seen in the way ?' He replied, 'I have heard the patience of the poor praised enough by many ; but have seen it imitated by few.'

'What more have you seen ?'

He said, 'Among delights I have found thorns ; among

¹ Ser. ii. 'De quatuor conditionibus,' &c. *Ex. i.* p. 119.

honours, I have seen sorrows ; and among riches I have found frequent strifes and great cares.'

'Is there no one free from these evils?'

He said sadly, 'Very few in these days. If there are many, I know not. Happy, therefore, are those Religious, who know how to be contented with few things, and desire to be honoured and praised by none ; for God will be their reward. For rarely has such a person met me, who has not grieved for his own ruin, or has not lamented the same concerning his neighbour. But if peace is to be expected anywhere in this life, then the truly humble man possesses it, who patiently endures wrongs, and is silent. He who wishes, therefore, to have peace and a good conscience, let him abandon for the love of God his own will, let him learn patiently to bear injury, and the contempt of men. For so Christ did, in bearing for us the ignominious cross, and in obeying His Father even unto death.'¹

There are several more anecdotes, and as two or three are illustrative of the subject which next comes before us, they will be given in the following chapter.

¹ *Ser. ad Novit.* secunda pars, x. sec. 17.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The delight and earnestness of à Kempis in public worship—Anecdotes—His love for sacred music—Several spiritual songs by à Kempis—What kind of place he would make the monastery—His supreme regard for the Bible—His self-abnegation—The cultivation of the interior life enforced in his Spiritual Exercises—His love of solitude and silence—How far the practice of these is desirable.

IN the services of the Sanctuary, Thomas à Kempis had a peculiar delight, and engaged in them with enthusiastic fervour and profound reverence. Looking back on his past life, it seemed a very psalm of praise and love. And this did not fail to influence the hearts of those about him, and stir them up also to earnest devotion and hearty worship. Like Arnold of Schoonhoven, the friend of his youth, he was all his life the earliest at the commencement and the latest at the close of the Divine service. He was indeed like one of those of whom Keble speaks :—

There are, who love upon their knees
To linger when their prayers are said,
And lengthen out their Litanies,
In duteous care for quick and dead.¹

‘It is difficult,’ says one of his biographers, ‘to say how divinely, and with how ready a mind, he discharged all things in the sanctuary and the offices of the Church. Whilst he was singing, he was to be observed with his face always raised towards heaven, as if inspired with a sacred enthusiasm, carried and borne beyond himself, by the wonderful sweetness of the Psalms: and so after this manner he would meditate—never resting as it were with his heels fastened to the earth, but touching the ground with the extremities of his toes, he seemed to be flying

¹ Prologue to *Lyra Innocentium*.

with the rest of his body towards heaven, where in mind and desire he was living. In singing he always stood with his body erect, never supporting himself on a seat, or on his arms, or leaning back. Night and day he was the first to enter the sanctuary, and always the last to depart. What the Divine worship and ecclesiastical decorum were to him in heart and affection, is beyond belief. So much so, that once upon a time a certain person observed in a jocose way, that Thomas seemed to him not only to be happy, but worthy of great admiration, because he sang the Psalms with such cheerfulness of voice, and with such readiness of mind and fervour, that to him the Psalms of David tasted like salmon. To which he at once replied, 'It is as you say; thanks be unto God, the Psalms are to me as if they were salmon.' And then he added, 'Yet are they not unfrequently turned to nausea and death, when I see the slothful not attending to what is going on, and not obedient to my voice.'¹

From various passages we learn that Thomas was very fond of music, provided it was employed in the service of God, or in elevating and strengthening the soul. It was at once a refreshment and delight. We see this in an illustration given in one of his sermons, where, from one or two expressions, it is thought that he himself is probably one of the persons named.

There was (he says) a certain Brother in the Order of the Regulars, devoted to God and very learned, a skilful singer, and a studious lover of Divine praise. Upon a certain occasion he was desirous to speak to another Brother in a friendly way, of the sweetness of Divine song, and concerning the solemn office that is used in the Church on the chief Festivals. Therefore, for his edification, and to comfort him in his timidity, he told him that he might sing more cheerfully in the choir. 'Brother,' he said, 'praise be to God, I have never felt weary in the Divine service, however long it was. For in the feast of Palms, although the Divine service seems somewhat long in comparison with other days, yet I do not feel fatigued with the length of the singing, but have felt myself so much disposed for it, that if any one had wished to begin

¹ Tolens. *Vita Thom. à Kemp.* sec. II.

afresh, entirely from the commencement, I would gladly have begun again and sung with him.' When the aforementioned Brother heard this, he was edified and rendered more cheerful in singing. This Senior Brother may well be believed (à Kempis adds), because he always came punctually with the first, rarely went out ; and if he did so from necessity, quickly returned ; and when present faithfully assisted, as far as he could, and did not cast his eyes on various objects.¹

But, mindful how the fretful flesh craves for ease and self-indulgence, and is at times beset with drowsiness, Thomas gives his younger Brethren some instances of the means used, either by himself or some of their Seniors, to overcome the temptations to sluggishness, when the services of God required their utmost attention.

Another Brother of the same Order, inspired by zeal for God, used bravely to contend against sleepiness, and was wont to adopt some violence against himself. For when oppressed with sleep in the choir, he drew out the hairs of his head with his own hands, roughly chafed his beard, pricked his nose with a pin, rubbed his eyes with spittle, and sometimes put a sharp piece of wood under his chin. And when he felt the motions of the flesh stir within him, he thought of the flames of the burning hell ; and with his finger nails deeply furrowed the skin of his body, and made red cicatrices on his wanton flesh, until the unlawful emotions, excited by the Devil, entirely ceased.²

Here are two other short anecdotes, very simply told by Thomas à Kempis, which scarcely merit notice, did they not give us some idea of the familiar way he had of illustrating his sermons, and shew how the Brethren used to kindly watch over and assist one another, when overtaken with heaviness in the worship of God :—

A certain Brother began to sleep a little during Matins. A Brother sitting near him observing this, put softly this word only into his ears : 'Hell.' Having heard this, he suddenly became frightened, and rousing himself up, threw off from him all drowsiness. Think, therefore, O sluggish one, of hell, adds Thomas, and thou wilt not sleep in the choir, when overcome by reason of weariness.³

¹ *Serm. ad Novit.* Pt. i. Serm. 6, Exemp. 3.

² *Ibid.* Exemp. 4.

³ *Ibid.* Exemp. 1.

The other example in which the gentleness of reproof is seen to be sufficient to at once arouse one of them to a sense of duty, is this :—

Another Brother also happened to be singing but little, when one standing near could not at last hear his voice, reproved him for sleeping at that time in the morning with the words, ‘Simon, sleepest thou?’ Then he being moved by these words, perceived that he had been discovered in sleep, and from amazement and shame was affrighted at the one admonishing him.¹

Thomas à Kempis was, it will be seen, not only very earnest in the public worship of God, but very anxious, and laboured much to keep it up within the monastery, in a state of exalted excellency and fervour; so that it should be no formal, perfunctory duty, no mere lip service, but a lively and hearty flame of devotion ascending up to the throne of God from willing, obedient, earnest souls. In one of his many little excellent works he thus speaks of the services of the Sanctuary :—

These three exercises of prayer, reading, and labour, meet in what is performed by us in the choir. Because here *prayer* is chiefly exercised in Psalms, Hymns, and Collects. Here also sacred *reading* is performed in reciting the Epistles and Gospels. Nor will instruction ever be wanting, if it be diligently attended to. Here Jesus speaks to us when we sing, ‘I am thy Salvation :’ and again, we speak to Jesus when we say, ‘Thou, O Lord, art my hope from my youth, my helper in necessities and in tribulation.’ Here good and acceptable *labour* is exercised when we stand with our bodies, and sing with our mouths. It is no small nor unfruitful labour to frequent the choir day and night. He is not idle who prays devoutly; nay, it is a very great labour to give oneself to prayer, when in no wise inclined for it. Nor is he idle who reads the Scriptures, or hears them read, or meditates upon them, or ponders over them in his heart. The choir becomes to this man a paradise, when he begins to take delight in all the Divine Scriptures.²

Nor was he backward in stirring up those who would lag behind, but shewed what a blessing a cheerful service to

¹ *Serm. ad Novit.* Pt. i. Serm. 6, Exemp. 2.

² *Alia Spiritualia Exercitia Viri Religiosi*, ch. v.

God would be to them ; thus in another treatise à Kempis says :—

At the sound of the bell for the choir make haste to get there in time with the first, and to say with the royal saints, ‘ This is the signal of the great King, let us go, and worship Him.’

Stand in the choir with fear and reverence, and praise the name of the Lord most High. Be wholly collected in thyself, and firmly intent upon God. Diligently listen to the words of God which are read and sung.

Be not overcome with weariness, but compel thy body to serve the spirit. For oftentimes new grace is given to those who sing devoutly. And if at the first sound of thy voice in the prayers, or in the reading, or the singing of Psalms thou hast no relish, still expect the grace of God, and persevere to the end.

The Lord will come presently, for He will visit him that crieth unto Him with a desiring heart. Then shall thine heart be struck with wonder, and shall be enlarged in all things that thou shalt hear or read. And thou shalt understand how manifold is His law. Blessed is the man whom He shall teach His testimonies, and shall dispose to the fulfilling of them at all times with great diligence.¹

And in a Manual for young Christians, after sounding a note for holy worship, from these words of the Psalmist, ‘ His praise is in the congregation of the Saints,’ he says :—

Rise up, Brother, thou who sleepest, and Christ shall enlighten thee. Rise, sluggard ; the bell sounds ; Christ calls thee. Rise quickly ; there is danger in delay. . . . But Satan suggests to thee on the other side, Lie a little longer, take a little more slumber ; it is yet early morning, and you will still be in good time. Thus the frail flesh is persuaded and allured ; and when thou yieldest to it, and fallest asleep again, the cunning enemy catcheth and ensnareth thee. For there is nothing so good, so holy, so delightful, nothing so divine and salutary, but this wicked one will endeavour to hinder, and always draw away souls to that which is evil. . . .

Therefore let the devout Psalms be in thy mouth, and the sweet Jesus in thine heart.²

And in the next chapter speaking of the Festivals of the Church, and applying the words of the Psalmist, ‘ Lord,

¹ *Exertia Spiritualia*, ch. v.

² *Doctrinale Juvenum*, ch. vii.

I have loved the beauty of Thy House, and the place of the habitation of Thy glory,' he says :—

This Thy House, O God, is made exceedingly beautiful and sublime with Thy feasts, and with the venerable relics of Thy saints in many places, by which the devotion of the faithful is much incited to praise Thee. Thou hast beautified the Heavens with Thy holy angels ; the firmament with the sun, the moon, and the stars ; the earth with men and beasts, and innumerable good things for our use. But now in the end of the world Thou hast by a special munificence given Thyself to us in the Holy Sacrament, as sweet manna for food, so that we should not be in this world without God and the food of angels. Every place, therefore, and church where the Host shall have been consecrated on the altar, or placed in the enclosed ark, ought to be held in the greatest reverence, with all the books, vessels, and vestments, which pertain to the worship of God.

Behold then, and consider the wonderful works of His holy Church. The temples of Christ and the Saints are the strongholds of Christians, wherein they watch and pray and fight against the Devil. The Festivals of Christ and the Saints point to the joys of the heavenly host, where those who despised the world now reign with Christ.¹

And further on in the same chapter he adds these remarks on Church music :—

The instruments of music in the Church move the hearts of the lukewarm to desire the eternal rewards of the blessed. The pleasant singing of Psalms inflames the souls of such as are dry to their first fervour, through the concert of many voices. The verses of the Hymns recreate the ears of the clerics, so that they sing and make a glad sound in the presence of God and His angels. For as the many pipes in the organ give forth a sweet sound to those who hear it ; so many Brethren, singing together in concord, greatly please God and all the citizens of Heaven. Let us then pray all together and invoke the name of Christ. And may the King of angels bring us at length to the society of the Heavenly citizens. Amen.²

Such are some of the sentiments of à Kempis with regard to all that pertains to Divine worship. We see how much his heart was set upon giving honour and praise to

¹ *Doctrinale Juvenum*, ch. ix.

² *Ibid.* i.

God in every possible way, and how he became an example for others to follow in this respect. And this will be a fitting place to introduce a few of those Hymns or Canticles which à Kempis composed for the use of the Brethren. He wrote them not only that they might sing them together in loving harmony, to animate and cheer each other in holy living, whether in church or in private concert; but that they might enliven their souls when alone, by the fitting words of holy song; for it was his endeavour to put soul and gladness into all the religious exercises of the community; and to have all the Brethren to bear in mind, and to put in practice, the exhortation of St. Paul, 'to be filled with the Spirit; speaking to themselves in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord.' There are two series of his poetical remains; one at the close of the second portion of his collected works, and another at the end of the third. They may be classed under three heads; those that relate to the monastic and ascetic life,—those that refer to what was the main theme upon which he dwelt, the Imitation of Christ, in various ways,—and the third portion have more the character of ecclesiastical hymns, such as call upon us to celebrate the Holy Trinity, the Life and Passion of Christ, John the Baptist, and John the Evangelist, the Virgin Mary, St. Agnes and other Saints. These two latter portions Thomas à Kempis calls '*Cantica Spiritualia*.' They well reflect the mind of Thomas and the earnest, childlike, loving devotion of his character, and though they may not find a leading place in sacred poetry, nor show any remarkable ability in Thomas as a hymnologist, yet are they full of religious enthusiasm, and manifest the endeavour of his life and the desire of his heart.

A selection of the following Canticles have therefore been kindly rendered from the Latin for this work, by one to whom the Church is much indebted, especially for a beautiful hymn, and are here given.

DOCTRINÆ DUÆ ALTA MENTE REPONENDÆ.

' Vitam Jesu Christi,' &c.

Be the life of CHRIST thy Saviour evermore thine imitation.
So in pureness, truth, and honour shall be found thy conversation.

Sing His Birth with holy gladness :

Mourn His Death with holy sadness :

Mingle gladness with thy mourning in thy spirit's exercises :

Wipe away thy woes with weeping : ware the world's delights
and prizes.

JESUS seek with search unfailing :

Knock and cry in prayer prevailing :

In adoring hymns delight thee ;

Thoughts of JESUS shall requite thee,

Yet more sweet His joy's fruition,

Sweeter yet His heavenly Vision.

Bear with love unceasing

All thy toil's increasing :

Show the world unkind

Wisdom's quiet mind :

Still by prayer and reading

All thy senses heeding,

And as hours are flying

Still thyself denying.¹

DE DULCEDINE JESU ET DE PLENITUDINE
GRATIARUM, ETC.*' O Dulcissime Jesu,' &c.*

O Child JESU, closest, dearest,

Who didst leave Thy Heaven above,
To the lost world the Life-giver !

O that I my love may prove,
Read, seek, sing Thee, tell Thy story,
Theme of sweetness, song of Love !

Son most High of God the Highest,
Yet the human tender Child :

¹ *Vita Bona Monac.* ii. 279.

Full of graces and of virtues,
 Yet the lowly and the mild :
 Those who love Thee much, nor leave Thee,
 Thou to God hast reconciled.

He who leaves Thee—Oh, the sorrow !
 He who finds Thee—Oh the bliss !
 For the Lord of Earth and Heaven
 Shall for evermore be his :
 Who (oh, marvel !) chose the manger
 And gave up that world for this !

These delights—the best and sweetest
 To the faithful soul must be—
 To recall Thee, O my Saviour,
 In Thy great Humility !
 In Thine absence these the relics,
 Holiest, dearest unto me !

I am glad—one time accursèd :
 I, one time so blind, can see :
 Unto me in darksome prison
 JESUS came and I am free !
 Naked, foolish, languid, dying,
 Heaven's Physician came to me !

FATHER of all light and goodness,
 Thou hast loved me in His grace :
 For in Him Thou hast provided
 From the storms a hiding-place.
 JESU, every cure of sadness
 Is reflected in Thy Face.

Praise to Thee, my kindest Saviour,
 Thee, my Lord and God for aye ;
 I am Thine, to my rejoicing,
 Till the world shall pass away :
 By Thy Love, O make me love Thee
 More and more as day by day !

Amen.²

¹ For the lines of the original not rendered here—

‘ O Venerabile Præsepium,’ &c. &c.

² *Cantica Spiritualia*, ii. 282.

Here are two other shorter ones :—

DE REMEDIO VITIORUM.

' Apprehende arma,' &c.

Take thy weapons, take thy shield :
Stray not from the battle-field :
Hours of ease are loss of glory :
Loss of guerdon idle story !
Toil it is that conquers care
And the cure of life is prayer.¹

DE PATIENTIÂ MARTYRUM.

' Sustine dolores,' &c.

Bear thy sorrows with Laurentius :
Spurn earth's honour with Vincentius :
Love thy Saviour with Ignatius :
Bear life's losses with Eustachius :
Christ acknowledge with Tyburtius :
Fight the dragon-fiend with Georgius :
He who battles with temptation
Shares the Martyrs' coronation.²

We give a few others also that are worthy of being noticed :—

HYMNUS DE SS. TRINITATE.

' O vera summa Trinitas,' &c.

Most true, most High : O Trinity,
Equal and undivided Three !
Our lauds of honour, power, and praise
And victory, unto Thee we raise.

With mind and heart on Thee we call :
Our knees before Thy footstool fall :
Our hands we lift in fervent prayer :
Our voices all Thy praise declare.

Creator ! Who to us hast given
The earth, the ocean, and the heaven :
From Thee too comes our joy of heart :
Our light, life, truth and way Thou art.

¹ *Vita Bona Monac.* ii. 277.

² *Ibid.*

Thee all things praise : in Thee they move,
 All things below and all above :
 The secret things of deepest Hell,
 Not hid to Thee, Thine honour tell.

O FATHER, Thine the glory be,
 Such glory, only SON, to Thee,
 And unto Thee, Whom we adore
 The PARACLETE, for evermore.¹

DE PATIENTIÂ SERVANDÂ.

'Adversa mundi tolera,' &c.

Bear the troubles of thy life
 In the name of CHRIST thy Lord :
 Less the harm of stormy strife
 Than the easy world's award.

Many a foe means many a friend ;
 Earthly losing is not loss !
 Patience has her perfect end,
 And all good flows from the Cross.

So thou giv'st thy Master praise !
 So o'er thee the angels sing :
 So thou dost thy brethren raise ;
 So thou shalt be twice a king !

Small thy toil is : short thy life :
 Grand and endless thy reward !
 Through the sorrow and the strife
 The confession of thy Lord !

Purer gold and clearer glass !
 By thy pains a nobler man,
 Through the furnace thou wilt pass,
 Bearing all a martyr can.

So thou wilt be sterner foe,
 So thou wilt be dearer friend ;
 So the saints thy name will know,
 And CHRIST own thee at the end.

¹ *Cantica Spiritualia*, iii. 206.

Call on JESUS evermore,
 Be His Cross thy sign alway,
 Love the Saints gone on before ;
 Ever strive and watch and pray.

Do the right : the truth declare !
 Live in hopes that never cease :
 Humbly make thy God thy care,
 So thou shalt find perfect peace.¹

CANTICUM DE GAUDIIS CÆLESTIBUS ET NOVEM
 CHORIS ANGELORUM.

' O qualis quantaque lætitia,' &c.

O joy, the purest, noblest,
 That fills the heavenly land,
 Of JESUS and of Mary
 And all th' angelic band :
 Glad faces and sweet voices,
 Round the Creator's throne,
 Adore Him, give Him glory,
 Their love and homage own.
 There with the peal of trumpets
 And thrilling harp-notes clear,
 In raiment white and glistening,
 The Angel hosts appear :
 There on swift wing of service,
 Or waiting His command,
 In the Thrice Holy Presence
 'They ever speed or stand.
 There ' Holy, Holy, Holy,'
 The better country's song,
 Quells every sound of sorrow,
 Of weeping and of wrong.
 There every voice in concord,
 There every heart in tune,
 Intent in rapture worship
 The Blessed Three-in-One.
 There Seraphim and Cherubim
 In love and praise adore ;
 Praise that is never-ceasing,
 Love that is more and more.

¹ *Cantica Spiritualia*, ii. 282.

Thrones, virtues, and dominions,
Powers, principalities,
Heav'n's highest good enjoying
In love that never dies,
In loyalty unceasing,
By sign and thunder-roll
Ever keep far the evil
And save the righteous soul.
The Archangels and the Angels
Rejoicing in the height
For all—the high or lowly—
In watchful care delight.
To God our prayers they offer,
From God His gifts they bring ;
They comfort, guide us, guard us,
And while they serve they sing.
These are we fain to honour,
These are we fain to love ;
With heart and life and utterance
Fixed on these things above :
There in the blissful regions
Of that all-beauteous land
Where men elect with Angels
Make one all glorious band.

State of divinest splendour !
Home of all-perfect rest !
With peace in all thy borders,
With light of beauty blest !
The citizens within thee
In purest raiment shine
And keep, in union closest,
The law of love Divine.
Nought is there that they know not :
Their service is not toil :
There never comes temptation,
Nor earthly care or moil.
There they are ever happy :
There they are ever wise :
There is their lot o'erflowing
With all that satisfies.

O sweet and blest Communion !
Love, Holiness, Truth, Light !

Where re~~g~~ns the Triune Godhead
 In Blessing infinite.
 To HIM be praise and honour
 From Angels and from men
 Whose grace this glory gave us !
 Blessed be GOD ! Amen.¹

A fitting sequence to these spiritual Songs and to his exhortations to praise, will be found in this pious meditation of Thomas à Kempis, concerning the desire of heavenly joy :—

‘Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House ; they will be praising Thee for ever and ever.’² O sweet and heavenly word, ‘they will be praising Thee’ ! Not themselves, but Thee : ascribing all good things to Thee, and not vainly attributing anything to themselves.

But how will they be praising Thee ? Most highly, most devoutly, most purely, most sweetly, most fervently, most clearly, most securely, most happily.

And what more ? Nay, thou canst not desire ought greater or better beyond this, where God is all, wholly present, excelling everything, and shining through all things ; and beautifying all and every one in glory.

O truly blessed life ! worthily to be praised, supremely to be loved, most greatly to be desired ; where all good things shall endure perpetually and most firmly together in all fulness with God, and united in God most pleasantly, without decay or any diminution. Blessed, therefore, are all those who dwell in Thy House, O Lord ; for ever and for ever will they be praising Thee.

Here I often sigh, as an exile in the world, at a distance from the kingdom of God, and with Thy saint in the psalter I inwardly pray, O when wilt Thou comfort me ? When wilt Thou make me glad with the joy of Thy countenance in Thy kingdom ?

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may glorify Thy holy Name, and praise Thee with all Thy saints, throughout Eternity for ever and ever. Amen.³

As few had a greater reverence for the *Word of God* than Thomas, or studied it more, that he might understand it and follow it, so first and before all things did he incite the devotees under his charge to do so in like manner. Hear what he says on this matter :—

¹ *Cantica Spiritualia*, ii. 280, 281.

² Ps. lxxxiv. 4.

³ *Doctrinale Juvenum*, ch. xii.

Before all the arts, learn to read the Holy Scriptures, to understand them rightly, to believe them firmly, to live godly and righteously, so that through the help of Christ thou mayest happily arrive at Life Everlasting. For the ignorance of the Divine Law is the mother of error, and the gate of death, the way to lose honour, virtue, and salvation. But the Word of God, and the doctrine of Christ, is the light of life, the salvation of the world, the gate of heaven, the food of the soul, the joy of the heart above all things to them that love God. Wherefore a learned man when converted said, 'To know a great many things without Christ is to know nothing at all; if, however, thou knowest Christ well, that is enough, though thou be ignorant of all besides.'¹ For without Him they would be hurtful to thee.

Let nothing, therefore, be preferred before the Holy Scripture; let nothing be superadded to Christ; let nothing be made equal² to Him Who said, 'I am the door of the sheep; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved.' And again, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' 'No one cometh to the Father but by Me.' No man cometh to heaven but by Me. No man can be delivered from hell but by Me. Whence St. Peter with much boldness of speech cried out against the Jews, 'There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'³

Thus did à Kempis uphold the paramount importance of the Bible, and the paramount importance also of looking to Christ above all else, and of listening to and obeying His Word; for, like a true master in Israel, he taught men not only to read the Scriptures and to try to understand them, but to be doers of the Word also. Hence he follows up what he has just said with these words:—

'My sheep hear My voice,' saith the Lord. He hears Christ's voice who despises the world, subdues the flesh, resists the Devil, and overcomes his vicious inclinations; who loves Jesus with his whole heart, and follows Him to the utmost. It is a great fault in the schools to speak Latin improperly, but it is a much greater fault, before angels even, to offend God daily, and not to grieve at it.

¹ 'Hoc est nescire, sine CHRISTO plurima scire; si CHRISTUM bene scis, satis est, si cætera nescis.'

² 'Coequandum.'

³ *Doctrinale Juvenum*, ch. i.

It is said, that knowledge has no greater enemy than the ignorant man ; and that conscience has not a sharper reprover than itself, when it rules badly. Of none, then, hast thou greater reason to complain, and to be indignant, than of thyself, O man, while thou art disobedient to God, for if there be no other witness, thine own conscience will accuse thee in the Judgment. For when thou actest contrary to virtue and to conscience, thou dost hurt and confound thyself. Therefore in all things that must be done be thou the guardian of thy heart and mouth, lest thou be inclined to that which is evil. And it will assist thee greatly to this end to continue in solitude, to pray, to study, to write, to keep thyself occupied.¹

Another point of holy living to which Thomas à Kempis draws attention, and from which human nature shrinks, but which he zealously practised and taught others to practise, was *self-abnegation*. Consider the following short lesson he gives :—

Christ. If any man come unto Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Disciple. O Lord God, this seems to be a hard saying of Thine. Who can fulfil it?

Christ. Hear, My son, and I will teach thee, and it shall not be hard and impossible for thee to do what I have said. Love Me, and relinquish thyself ; and thou shalt find Me in every place and at all times.

I am the sovereign good, and most supremely to be desired of thy soul. Behold, I stand at the door of thine heart and knock ; open unto Me ; and I will come into thee, for I am thy Salvation and thy Life.

I am all in all ; and must be loved and praised above all. I am wholly thine, here and everywhere present. But the blind see Me not, and the deaf hear Me not, and the fool doth not understand these things.

Be thou, therefore, wholly Mine ; and in nothing be seeking thyself, and thy God shall taste most sweet to thee, above all things.

Disciple. O Lord, what Thou sayest is true, what Thou speak est is altogether pleasing to me. I will therefore, without further delay, leave myself on account of Thee, lest I should be late in finding Thee.

¹ *Doctrinale Juvenum*, ch. ii.

Thou in me, and I in Thee, through that love which Thou kindest in me. I beseech Thee, remain freely with me, lest being left by Thee, I should faint, as an exile in prison and as a pilgrim on the road.

Help me, I shall be saved, and I will meditate on all Thy ways, words, and deeds, both by day and night. I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength, purely and perfectly for Thine own sake ; and all things that are made by Thee, on account of Thee.

Neither will I love myself, but for Thy sake, and always more than myself. But all things will I love below Thee, and Thee alone above all good things in heaven and in earth.

Thou alone art fully and perfectly sufficient for me ; therefore I will have nothing, I desire nothing, but Thee ; for Thou art before all things, and above all things, and in all things, God blessed for ever. Amen.¹

As in a mirror Thomas à Kempis reflects his own life in these sacred lessons. And he herein shews what is the essence of the inner life, as well as the foundation of true religion. In two other short works, called ‘Spiritual Exercises,’ Thomas à Kempis enters further and more particularly into the cultivation of the interior life, and shews us how a man must deal closely, sincerely, and firmly with himself if ever he would attain to a more perfect standard of holiness. These ‘Spiritual Exercises’ were justly held in high esteem ; and are thought to have been mainly learnt by à Kempis from his early friend John Kettle, the cook in the House at Deventer. In some parts they apply especially to those living a conventual life ; the larger portion, however, may be advantageously used by devout Christians in all conditions of life. I cannot do more, however, than give a few passages, as I have done in former instances, from some of his other works. Here we have a fervid exhortation to the Spiritual life :—

‘Be renewed in the spirit of your minds,’ saith the blessed Apostle. It is the custom of devout Christians to have certain good exercises, whereby they may be daily incited to spiritual progress and the love of piety. Such persons love retirement, and fly from the tumult of the world ; they anxiously examine their

¹ *Doctrinale Juvenum*, ch. xi.

own lives ; and if they have offended in anything, they endeavour at once to purge it away by worthy contrition. They watch over their thoughts ; they are very mindful of the affections by which they are moved ; and by frequent prayer, and meditation on the sacred Scriptures they defend themselves against transgressions of the heart, and say, 'Remove from me the way of wickedness ;' and, 'Concerning Thy law, do Thou have mercy on me.' For that heart which is not occupied with interior and devout exercises, must of necessity be carried away to divers things, and be easily corrupted with vices.

The first of all these exercises, and most useful to the purification of the mind, is, to acknowledge the vicious passions of the soul, and with sighs and tears to beseech of God to grant a remedy for them. For the poor, the sick, those afflicted with a wounded body, do, with piteous cries ask for relief from the passers-by. And much more will a compassionate and merciful God not despise the prayer of the contrite spirit, sighing after Eternal salvation.

Thou must, therefore, have certain exercises suited for thy manner of life, which may serve to instruct, renew, and inflame thee. And these private exercises must not exclude those that are for the public good, but rather make thee more prompt to return to them, so that thou mayest not incur anything detrimental to internal peace. Nevertheless if thou shouldest be hindered on some occasion from accomplishing what thou hast begun, thou shouldest as quickly as possible return to thyself again.

Thou must frequently also look into thy book, that thou mayest more distinctly know thy internal advancement, or deficiency. According to the grace given thee, set definitely before thee the standard of thy sacred calling. No one is better instructed to every good thing than he who is inwardly led by the Holy Spirit, whose unction the meek and humble man is fitted to receive.

It is the part of a wise man to order his own life, and to resolve upon a suitable end to his actions. It behoves him also to inquire after convenient means, by which he may attain his chief purpose in life.

One resolute action of a wise man is far more profitable than the great occupation of a fool. He who acts unseasonably and inconsiderately easily offends, and being offended too, is himself hurt. But he who is accustomed to deliberate wisely beforehand will always heartily rejoice in the end.

Be mindful of thine own frailty, even when good success attends thee ; and do not think too highly concerning thyself ;

for God, who humbleth those who are lifted up, is the hammer of the proud.

Every morning propose to thyself after what manner the present day should be spent most profitably. Take more diligent care to oppose those vices which most beset thee.

Daily exercise fits the soul for an increase of grace ; and perseverance in good leads on to the heights of virtue. Perhaps this may be thy last day. Set a guard upon thyself ; neglect not the time thou hast ; the hour once past will not return.

Fight the good fight. Pray for grace, and a holy victory will be given thee from heaven. Study to overcome thyself in lesser matters, lest laziness prevailing, thou fall into that which is worse. Let the law of God always dwell in thine heart : let not the giving of thanks and the voice of praise grow cold in thy mouth.

All time not spent with God, bewail as lost. Avoid taking part in trivial discourse, and oppose unnecessary visits from house to house. Set before thee in the quiet of thy cell some notable brief mementoes, to admonish thee on going out, and to reprove thee shouldst thou tarry long abroad.

At the beginning of the day bless the Creator of heaven and earth, Who has granted thee further time for amendment. Let it be Christ for thee to live ; and direct thy whole labour to His praise. He is thy sole hope, and the Eternal reward which thou expectest : and neither seek after, nor be affected by, human praise.

Before any external work lift up thine heart to God. Whatever good thou shalt do or say, do not think highly of thyself, but judge thyself truly to be but an unprofitable servant.

The work being ended, or the 'hours' performed, render thanks for what thou hast done well, and ask pardon sorrowfully for negligences that may have crept in.

Whether thou be inwardly engaged, or transactest business abroad, always keep thy soul in thy hands ; and do not forget the resolutions of the day, which, alas, too often come to nothing through carelessness.¹

There are many more such like words of godly counsel ; and in summing up these sentences of heavenly wisdom by this venerable saint of God, it should be observed that their influence was far-reaching, and was not alone confined to the monastery where he dwelt. Doubtless the Brethren

¹ *Exercitia Spiritualia*, chs. i. ii. iii.

there were first benefited by them, hearing them from his own mouth ; but they were so much approved of, that copies of them were sought for, and obtained by other Houses of 'the Brotherhood of Common Life,' wherein many of the learned and pious of a succeeding generation were then being trained. And it is not unreasonable to presume, more particularly after what is laid before the reader in another chapter, that the seeds of vital religion—a love for Holy Scripture, an earnest endeavour after holiness of life, together with a personal love and following of Christ—were scattered broadcast through the land, took root, and afterwards yielded much fruit. Whilst not oblivious of the work carried on by other devout souls, it is but due to the memory of Thomas à Kempis to shew that his teaching was not confined to the narrow sphere of his own community, but spread far and wide. And this indeed may be said with truth of those who made it their endeavour to live according to the holy rules he laid down ; for they who followed his godly counsels attained to a higher level in the Christian life than most professors of religion do now ; and more or less they became shining lights in a dissolute age, and among a people where darkness much abounded.

The exercises of *Solitude and Silence* enter largely also into the life and teaching of à Kempis, and are regarded by him as Christian virtues. But since they are not popular subjects, and are but rarely touched upon in the pulpit, or discussed in the religious publications of the day, it seems desirable to consider the stand-point from which à Kempis regarded them ; for so much depends upon the light and position in which anything is looked at. For it may be asked, Are not these practices belonging to the dark ages and unsuited to our times ? Are they not of the same category as scourging oneself, fasting, and abjuring all intercourse with the world, and the giving up of all earthly pleasures ? People in the world cannot understand why persons should choose and prefer such a life to one that is free and easy. It is a mystery to them, and they are apt to

think these persons weak and foolish ; but they have yet to learn the secret of it, and to view it in a right light, which will make them think differently from what they do of these men. There are even worthy and devout Christians who look upon these practices with abhorrence, and wonder what good or what happiness can be derived from them, or how they are to promote a man's salvation. They imagine that for a man to immure himself in a cell for days and years together, having little intercourse with his fellow-creatures, or to engage in a constant round of Divine worship and sacred devotions, and to practise self-denial in many ways, must be very dismal, if not hurtful to the soul, and afford no delight.

Now, first of all, let us put away from our minds all prejudices and preconceived notions that we have entertained concerning these things, and place ourselves in the position of Thomas à Kempis, and endeavour to see things as he saw them, as one very anxious for his soul's salvation, and that of others around him ; and who consequently, whether rightly or wrongly, took the best means, as he thought, in the attainment of it.

Now it is only natural that the desires and endeavours after the higher Christian life should thrust out and keep in abeyance the lower desires of our nature : this is according to the law of our being, just as it is in the growth of our desires from childhood to manhood. The child has a desire for toys and sweet things, his happiness is chiefly in them ; but let ten or a dozen years pass over his head, and they are thrust on one side as beneath him ; his delight is now in sports, games, races, and such like things. A few more years pass by, and he gains a more serious view of life, he sees that it is given him for other purposes than to pass his time in amusements and pleasure, and the games and sports are now almost entirely laid on one side ; he is anxious to try his capabilities, to see what he can do for himself in life ; he is wishful to make a position for himself, to do something worthy of himself and gain a name and place somewhere in society ; and you now find him hard at

work in some dingy study, burning it may be the 'midnight oil' in his eager pursuit after learning ; or spending long hours in some dusky office, or in wearily writing all day long in some busy counting-house, trying in this or some other way to plant his foot securely on the ladder, by which he is to mount upwards in life. And now he has little or no time, or thought, or desire, for wasting his precious hours in the ways he had formerly done ; for those things are foolishness unto him. And may it not be so in the religious life ; when a man gains still higher views of his being—when the feeling is forcibly borne in upon him, that he is immortal, that this world is not the place he is to stop in, that he has a soul to save, a God to glorify, a work for Him to do in the world, that he has to fit himself for the life to come, by endeavouring to conform himself to the will of God ; and as he sets himself to the attainment of these graces does he not get a taste for other things than what those do who are indifferent about the spiritual life ? Does he not get other desires, other likings, and adopt other ways and measures in the pursuit of his grand aim ; very different from those who live after the flesh ? counting all the vanities and pleasures, all the wealth and honours, and great things of the world that men so eagerly run after and think too much of, as loss and dung, that he may win Christ and be found in Him.

This was Thomas à Kempis's standpoint. Most men form some conception of the highest type of life, and set themselves to follow it. Some regard the acquisition of money as their chief aim in life, and toil night and day after it. Others are in pursuit of fame, either in the army, the senate, or at the bar, and leave no stone unturned in their endeavours. Then there are others who conceive that their highest ideal of life is perfect rest and enjoyment ; and endeavour to surround themselves with everything that will contribute to it. But surely the noblest conception of life is that which à Kempis held—to aim after a perfect conformity to the will of God ; for this will of God, be it remembered, is best adapted for man's real happiness and

perfection, and in whatever degree he comes short of it, in that degree will he come short of finding true rest. And though we ourselves may not altogether agree with the means à Kempis adopted in the attainment of this noble conception of life, yet is there some sanction for these means, and good reason for the use of them. And we may feel sure that à Kempis found as much delight and interest, if not more, in the pursuit of holiness, and seeking the favour and love of God, than those engaged in the pursuit of money, fame, or pleasure do. There is toil and inconvenience in the acquiring of the latter, even as there is in the endeavour to become perfect men in Christ; and there are many sad disappointments and sorrows in them, which are not found in the narrow way of life. What, however, gave a relish and delight to à Kempis in these exercises which he followed, was the love of Jesus, which burned brightly within him. That à Kempis highly esteemed solitude and silence as means for attaining conformity to the will of God, there is little doubt. One of the treatises which he wrote is entitled 'De Solitudine et Silentio;' he has, moreover, written a chapter on both these subjects in his 'Vallis Liliorum,' and constantly do we find a reference to them in his works. One or two extracts and a couple of anecdotes will suffice to shew how he regarded them. After quoting in one place the passage from the Psalms where the devout penman cries, 'Oh that I had the wings of a dove, for then would I flee away, and remain in the wilderness,' à Kempis thus begins:—

And why? Because of the numerous advantages which will come to my soul in so doing; as well as to guard and restrain my heart from the various distractions with which the world allures the senses. . . .

Solitude and silence are therefore profitable to inward peace, and dispose us for the gift of fervent prayer; and it is much more easy to find these in the retirement of the closet, than in the tumult of the world.

As the fish soon dies when taken out of the water, so a monk drawn from his cell speedily yields to distraction, and becomes sullied in soul. . . .

Roses flourish in an enclosed garden, and remain unhurt ; but cast in the public road, they quickly fade away and are trodden underfoot.

So the wandering and misguided monk soon becomes vile, when he often appears abroad ; but he who flies from the distractions of the world and remains within, sheds abroad the sweet odour of sanctity.

Love then Solitude and Silence if thou wouldst enjoy devotion and peace of soul ; for it behoveth him who would remain unhurt among men to be strongly fortified, to keep a good guard over himself, and not to be hindered in interior exercises.¹

In one of his sermons he says :—

He who is patient and silent causes many quarrels to cease. The religious man remaining in concealment is like a lamp burning safely in the night. The winds may blow and will not hurt him. He has leisure to wait on God and to pray. Truly a great treasure is in the mouth of a wise man, but not less in the heart of a silent and praying one. A certain person has said, ‘ Whatever good I gathered in silence, this I almost entirely lost in speaking with men.’ Because Samson told his secret to a woman, and did not conceal the parable of the honey, he was afterwards taken and deluded by the enemy. It is good, therefore, for a religious man to preserve silence, and carry his words, like a bag of money, to the home of his mind.²

À Kempis then gives us two simple anecdotes on each of these subjects. Here is the one on silence : ‘ There was in the upper country a certain monk of the Cistercian order, a careful guardian of his mouth, and a diligent observer of the discipline of the cloister. This man, kindled with the zeal of devotion, used scarcely to speak a single word in a week. To whom the Abbot said, for sake of relief, “ I give you permission to speak sometimes with your Brethren.” The man answered, “ Oh Reverend Father, I do not desire to have such a permission.” Hearing this, the Abbot was edified by the answer of the Brother, in his being willing to remain silent.’³

Here is another anecdote concerning solitude which à Kempis relates : ‘ A certain Brother of the Order of

¹ *Vallis Liliorum*, chap. xviii.

² *Secunda Pars*, ser. II, sec. 8.

³ *Ibid.* sec. 9.

Regulars being sent out of doors, and having completed his business, he much wished to return quickly home, that he might more freely have leisure for God in silence. But having set out on his way, he found a certain traveller, a friend and one known to him, who said that he had visited various places for the purpose of seeing holy persons and monasteries. Being interrogated concerning religious houses, he said that he had been, among other places, in the sacred cloister of the Carthusians. And when he had told many good things of the position of that place, as being on a lofty mountain, and of the close solitude and the strictness of the Brethren living there, he at length said, "I found there a Brother with whom I could freely speak, and from curiosity I asked him, 'How long a time hast thou dwelt here?' who replied, 'Forty years have glided by, and, in the interim, I have not seen the outer gate, by which I first entered.'" Hearing these things, the afore-named Brother was astonished, and related it to the other Brethren as a good example of loving solitude. O how rare and foreign,' continues à Kempis, 'is that to many religious persons in these times, who regard it as the punishment of a prison, if within the year they may not go beyond the railings of the monastery and the outside wall for the sake of rambling about!'¹

These anecdotes and counsels more especially apply to hermits and those living in monasteries, who have doubtless opportunities of practising both solitude and silence to their profit, to an extent which those who have duties in the world to perform have not. And while I would not censure or condemn these exercises, practised by very earnest men, who are seeking to attain to a nearer walk with God than their fellows, but rather rejoice that there are men who give themselves a living sacrifice to God—though it be different from what many religious people would choose—and admire their zeal and perseverance; I would observe, that the practise of these exercises needs a high degree of grace and much watchfulness, to make them

¹ *Secunda Pars*, ser. II, sec. 10.

really profitable to the soul ; and that, however good in themselves a prudent use of them may be, an extreme continuance of them would be injurious to very many, if not positively dangerous, and therefore the long observance of them should not be generally advocated.

At the same time it must not be forgotten, that in the case of those Christians who have to live in the world, and have to mix much with society, it would frequently have been much better for them had they learnt to practise a little more solitude and silence than they have done ; how many there are of those who know themselves in some measure, who would confess, that if they had oftener held their peace—if they had not loved to gossip so much, if they had not been so fond of rushing into society, if they had not busied themselves so much with other men's matters, if they had not entered upon business affairs which had no real claim upon them, if they had not pushed themselves forward so much into notice, when there was no clear call for them to do so—their own souls would not have been so much neglected, and they themselves would have enjoyed more peace of mind.

Though à Kempis may urge the observance of solitude and silence to a greater degree than many among us may think expedient or desirable ; yet in due measure, and in the occasional use of them, I cannot doubt that they would prove exceedingly advantageous to many souls. The admonitions and counsels of à Kempis in respect of them would be found very useful, and productive of renewed devotion ; and if more observed would exercise a salutary influence upon the soul. For the object and purpose which he had in view in commending both solitude and silence are not to be forgotten ; for it is essential to bear in mind that the cultivation and improvement of the inner man, of a life hid with Christ in God, cannot well be attained, or maintained, without the exercise of both these, and it is in this light also that we may regard them as Christian virtues. How is the soul to become acquainted with itself otherwise, and to know its own sinfulness truly, and its

need of grace and pardon? How is it to become acquainted with God, His holiness and goodness, His sovereignty and power, His love and justice? 'Be still then, and know that I am God,' is the word of the Most High; for without retirement and quiet meditation you must not expect to know God, and saving life, as you ought. And how can thorough communion with God be carried on, or a thorough union with Him be otherwise established?

The followers of Christ may learn from the example and instructions of their Lord and Master how needful it is to the soul's health sometimes to retire for awhile from the bustle of active life; for, not only was He led up by the Spirit into the wilderness and was there alone for forty days, but He would seek moments of retirement during His ministry, as when He was alone all night in prayer on the mountain; and do we not hear Him saying to His disciples on one occasion, 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile'? And has He not said, 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father in secret'? The work is so solemn and important that you must secure yourself in some way from the intrusion of the world for a time. And with regard to the virtue of silence, does not our Saviour, in that same Sermon on the Mount, bid His followers beware also of an unguarded tongue, when He says, 'Let your communication be Yea, yea, Nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil;' and again, 'For every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment'? With the Psalmist then we should oftener cry, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips,' and resolve like him, saying, 'I will keep my mouth as it were with a bridle, while the ungodly is in my sight.'

We cannot then but see that à Kempis had some high authority, and good reason for the advice he gives with regard to solitude and silence. And though men often shrink from them, and others appear by the force of circumstances to neglect them, yet are they so needful for

their spiritual welfare, that God oftentimes enforces them upon men, that He may have them to Himself, and that He may speak to them. It may be in the desertion or loss of friends, or when removed from them to a distance ; or through some misfortune or sickness whereby they are forcibly withdrawn from society for a time. Thus God deals with His elect, as He saith by the mouth of His prophet Ezekiel, ‘I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face.’ But, without entering into further discussion on these points, I think it must be admitted that these exercises of solitude and silence are not to be confined to the cloister alone, but may be made profitable to all, may be the means of lifting the soul to loftier heights, and are more or less needful to be observed by all those who would make any advance in grace, and become real lovers of Christ.

Other characteristics in the life and teaching of à Kempis will be adduced in the next chapter, and then some evidence will be brought forward to show how others who sought him and his counsels were influenced by them, which will lead me to give an account of one of some note who was early impressed by him as to the value of true religion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The temperance of à Kempis in all things—Avoiding extreme asceticism—His regard for learning and science kept subservient to Divine things—Some disciples of à Kempis—John Wessel's early acquaintance with him—Luther's admiration of Wessel—Educated by 'the Brothers'—Wessel's character—His views on religious subjects, and his writings—How he differed from à Kempis—Many points of agreement with him.

THOMAS À KEMPIS was now an old man; yet the weight of years rested lightly upon him. He had long been at peace with God, Who was his refuge and hope, his defence and support continually. He did not relax his labours, but as God gave him strength he still continued copying such books as were needed, and such as would advance religion and learning; he still continued to instruct his younger Brethren, though not now in charge of them as formerly, and to give private audiences to those who sought his counsel; he still continued to take an active and fervent part in the religious services of the Church and the sacred 'hours,' and was ever mindful of those seasons of secret prayer and devout communion with God his Saviour which so much refreshed his soul. Thus did he keep his mind and heart continually occupied, changing from one pursuit or duty to another, and then returning to them again with fresh ardour. This was a principle in his life which he persevered in; and this doubtless contributed to his longevity, together with that moderate asceticism which he adopted.

Joined then to this wise activity I must notice *his temperance* in all things. As to bodily nourishment, he never indulged in superfluous food, but rather stinted himself, observing with fidelity the fasts of the Church, and never running at other times to excess in eating or

drinking, so that he kept his outward frame free from those ill humours which are apt not unfrequently to spring up and engender disease, as well as to clog the soul, in those that fare sumptuously every day. Neither, on the other hand, did he run to inordinate excess in abstinence and mortification of the flesh, so as to weaken his body, and unfit himself for vigorously and actively serving God and discharging the various duties of his calling. Avoiding that extreme asceticism into which some of the early Fathers of the Brotherhood were drawn, through the intenseness of their religious fervour, and which doubtless cut short their lives in some instances, à Kempis kept within due bounds, and used such self-denials and such abstinence as the Church rightly directs us to pray for, 'that our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may in all things obey His godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to the honour and glory of God.' Moderate in all things, sensible of human weakness, and ever manifesting the innate gentleness of his disposition he disapproved of all extravagance and excess. Setting out from the principle, 'that all that goes beyond measure and does not keep within its own distinctive limits, can neither please God, nor be of long duration,'¹ he says:—

If you desire to carry through a fixed method of life, you must steer a middle course between two extremes, so as not presumptuously to attempt what is above your ability,² nor yet, on the other hand, to leave undone what you are well able to do. God requires of thee, not the destruction of thy body, but the vanquishment of thy sins. He demands not what is unprofitable, but what is conducive to thy salvation. He counsels well, and provides the things necessary for thy life, in order that thou mayest make a good use of the body, to advance the welfare of the soul, but in no point to overstep the proper measure of discretion.

And again, further on in the same work, he says:—

It is hence requisite in every spiritual work, in order to finish well what you have begun, to observe the common rule, to avoid

¹ *De Disciplina Claustral.*, ix. 2.

² *Ibid.* ix. 1. 'Si vis stabilem bene vivendi ordinem servare, *inter duo extrema, per medium iter incede*; ut nihil per arrogantiam ultra vires attentes.'

singularity ;¹ in doubtful and dark points to follow the advice of the superior, and, with the due measure of discrimination, to yield obedience in all uprightness.²

Hence a modern writer observes, 'In this manner, with temperance in meat and drink, and zeal in ascetic exercises, but without carrying them to an injurious extent, Thomas seems in his own case to have preserved to the last day of his life a healthy state of body and soul, a cheerful disposition, and a fresh and clear eye. It is also in part to be ascribed to the same moderation that he attained to so unusual an old age ; whereas we behold Gerard, Florentius, and Zerbolt, who, in the heat of conversion, gave themselves up to excessive penances, dying in early life.'³ And this moderation and consistency of conduct extended to other things, for Thomas says :—

To wish at one time to have nothing, and to choose superfluities to-morrow, is not to love poverty, but to foment cupidity ; at one time to refuse what is necessary, and to-morrow to seek something specially for oneself, is not to keep abstinence, but to excite gluttony ; at one time not to be willing to eat what is suitable, and to-morrow to murmur at a lack of food, is not the sign of an abstinent mind, but the prodigy of impatience. To work so hard at reading and writing to-day, that it will be followed by a head-ache, is not to nourish the mind, but to render yourself unfit for other good works. To say nothing to-day, and to indulge in loose talk to-morrow, is to break the rule of silence, and not to preserve the zeal of our Order, but to offend many of the Brethren. To sing so high to-day, that to-morrow you are quite hoarse, or can scarcely open your lips for singing, is not praising God, but disturbing others in the choir.⁴

Thus did à Kempis advocate, as he likewise pursued, that wise and salutary prudence in all things, for which his Order became so famous.

In the same light also did he view *learning, knowledge, and science*. À Kempis had lived with men of learning,

¹ 'Singularitatis caveas notam.' A similar sentence to this is found in the fifth sermon of his second series towards the close, where he says, 'Cave singularitatem, verbis et moribus ostendere.'

² *Ibid.* ix. 3.

³ Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation*, ii. p. 155.

⁴ Thom. à Kemp., *Disciplina Claustral.*, ix. 2.

who took a peculiar delight in it, and he had opportunities for devoting himself to learning, but he regarded it as subservient to higher objects, and was on his guard that the soul should not be wholly given to it. And though he speaks, in one or two places, disparagingly of his want of elegance in writing, and is not ranked among learned men, yet it must not be supposed that he was without learning—that he had a distaste for it, or was indifferent to the promotion of it. Besides reading the Bible diligently in Latin, and copying it out, he had read some of the works of its patristic expositors, shewn a keen appreciation of its mystical sense, and recommended to others the careful study of it. He wrote his works in Latin, and though occasional barbarisms, or rather provincialisms, occur, yet it is admitted that on the whole he expresses himself in the language of scholars with ease and fluency.¹ He loved good and useful books, and took a lively interest in their collection, preservation, and use ;² considering it as a necessary ornament of a good monastery, to possess as rich and beautiful a library as possible, and reckoning it as one of the standing duties of a true monk to read and write books.³

Mgr. Malou, who had read the works of Thomas à Kempis with a critical eye, and was able to give an opinion upon them, remarks that he saw in them features truly sublime, and a marvellous art in describing and analysing the movements of the human heart. ‘At one time, Thomas regards the soul as loaded with temptations, and yielding to weakness ; at another, as rousing itself up with energy to the practice of virtue ; and then again, as rising to the most sublime sentiments of contemplation. He understands so well these fluctuations of the mind and heart that he analyses them with a justice that strikes, with a gentleness that charms, and then directs them with an admirable fitness, by reflections the most natural, the most encouraging, and the most desirable. In the book of the

¹ Ullmann, *Ref. before the Reformation*, ii. 134.

² *Doctrinale Juven.*, cap. 4 and 5.

³ *Ibid.*, cap. vii. 2.

"Imitation" you would seek in vain for the transporting discourses which one meets with in the Fathers, the methodical and profound considerations which sparkle in the writings of the greater Doctors. The author of this book has other merits; his language is brief, his thoughts concise; the profundity of his doctrine never strikes you except by its justness. In a word, his discourse is not the inipetuous torrent which rolls, swells itself, roars and astonishes; it is the tranquil and limpid stream which flows over flowery borders.'¹

Professor Mooren also, who has thoughtfully read the works of à Kempis, says, 'These admirable discourses, or rather these effusions of a heart enlightened from God, flow as a divine fire which purifies souls with power. These are monastic gardens which flourish under the dew of heaven, thickets which produce flowers of every form and of every colour, of an incomparable beauty. You see there lilies of purity, whiter than the snow, roses of divine charity, blue cyancias of celestial contemplation, dark violets of nightly prayer, the purple flowers of the passion, and other flowers rich in mystical signification.'²

It is admitted that the other works of Thomas à Kempis are not in general equal to the book of the 'Imitation.' This is apparent; the author of it was himself seemingly convinced of it, since he copied the four books of the 'Imitation,' placed at the head of his works in 1441, and treated them as his masterpieces. Still in all his works there is the same deep knowledge of the human heart evinced, the same pure stream of divine affection, the same justness and force of expression in applying the remedies, as in giving directions for the well-being of souls, which in a higher degree is found in his most celebrated works.

Let it be borne in mind that à Kempis was a very fruitful writer; and it is scarcely to be expected that all his works should exhibit the like ability: still from the testimony that has been advanced it must be admitted

¹ *Recherches*, p. 212.

² *Nachrichten über Thomas à Kempis*, p. 178.

that he had some skill and ability as a writer, and was not without a fair share of learning. When therefore he speaks about learning and knowledge it is not from the position of an unlearned man, who depreciates that of which he has no knowledge, and despises what he has not got. Thomas was possessed of it in ample measure, and knew its value. He says, 'Learning is not to be blamed, nor the mere knowledge of anything whatsoever, for that is good in itself, and ordained of God ;'¹ and again, 'A dutiful and humble inquiry after truth is allowable, provided we be always ready to be taught.'² And yet mark how he would guard us from running to extremes in search after it, and from suffering it to become an absorbing element in a man's life, to the exclusion, neglect, or hindrance of his soul's welfare. 'All men naturally desire knowledge ; but what availeth knowledge without the fear of God? Surely, an humble husbandman that serveth God is better than a proud philosopher, who, neglecting himself, is occupied in studying the heavens. . . . If I understood all things in the world, and had not charity, what would it avail me in the sight of God, Who will judge me according to my deeds? Cease from an inordinate desire of knowledge, for therein is much distraction and deceit.'³ He asserts the vanity of even theological and Scriptural learning, without an endeavour to obtain the graces of Christian life. 'What will it avail thee to be engaged in profound reasonings concerning the Trinity, if thou be devoid of humility, and art thereby displeasing to the Trinity? . . . I had rather feel compunction, than know the definition thereof. If thou knewest the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it profit thee without the love of God, and without grace?'⁴

Surely there is a danger in the pursuit of learning against which à Kempis lifts a warning voice. 'What availeth it to cavil and dispute about dark and hidden

¹ *De Imit. Christi*, I. iii. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, I. ii. 1.

² *Ibid.*, IV. xviii. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I. i. 3.

things, for ignorance of which we shall not be reprovèd at the Day of Judgment? It is a great folly to neglect the things that are profitable and necessary, and to choose to dwell upon that which is curious and hurtful. . . . An humble knowledge of thyself is a surer way to God than a deep search after learning. . . . Because many endeavour rather to get knowledge than to live well, therefore they are often deceived, and reap either none, or but little fruit. O, if men bestowed as much labour in the rooting out of vices, and the planting of virtues, as they do in the moving of questions, neither would so many evils be done, nor so great scandals be given in the world. Truly at the Day of Judgment we shall not be examined as to what we have read, but as to what we have done; not as to how well we have spoken, but as to how religiously we have lived. . . . How many perish by reason of the vain learning of this world, who take little care of the serving of God.' ¹

How admirable too are the admonitions which à Kempis gives in the relations which learning, faith, and obedience have to each other. 'It is a blessed simplicity when a man leaves the difficult ways of questions and disputings, and goes forward in the plain and firm path of God's commandments. Many have lost devotion, whilst they sought to search into things too high. Faith is required at thy hands, and a sincere life; not height of understanding, nor deep inquiries into the mysteries of God. . . . Human reason is feeble and may be deceived, but true faith cannot be deceived. All reason and natural search ought to follow faith, not to go before it, or break in upon it.' ² In these passages we see how à Kempis regarded learning as the handmaid of religion, not as independent of it; how he would consecrate it to the investigation of the highest problems of life and religion; and how it should always be prosecuted in the fear of God, and within due limits, lest it should make us too high-minded, or divert us from the things of God, and the cultivation of our own souls in true godliness.

¹ *De Imit. Christ.*, I. iii. 1, 4, 5.

² *Ibid.*, IV. xviii. 2, 5.

And when we consider how many excellent and earnest men have been cut off in early life, by too eager a pursuit of learning ; how many able literary men have become like wandering stars, whom you cannot help pitying, through too great a conceit of their learning—it is not unlikely that the temperate and wise view which Thomas took of it, moderating his desires after it, and making it subordinate to higher objects in life, was another means, in addition to those we have mentioned, of prolonging his most valuable life, and giving a healthy tone to his teaching. The salutary advice too which Thomas gives with regard to learning and the attainment of knowledge, should come with all the greater weight when we know that he was among those who were the first in his country in furthering the restoration of learning.

It has been already shewn how the Brothers of Common Life laboured in promoting not only the education of the people, but in giving greater facilities and encouragement for the furtherance of learning to youths of ability ; and how diligent they were in transcribing valuable works of literature when there were no printing-presses, and in collating manuscripts, so as to get the most correct editions for circulation. The Bible and other religious books had their chief attention, but their labours were not confined entirely to these. And though we have no particular mention of Thomas à Kempis coming prominently forward in this effort, yet it is a remarkable coincidence, from which it may justly be inferred that he took no mean part in the work, that at the time when he was held in most esteem, and had become famous for his writings and saintly life, the community had just entered upon what was considered the second epoch of their history, which was one of learning. It is moreover evident that à Kempis must have given no small encouragement to the zealous prosecution of learning, and even to the acquisition of a classical education, from the fact that several of the most meritorious restorers of ancient literature went forth from the quiet retirement of the monastery where he con-

tinued to sustain the primitive ardour of the 'Brothers of Common Life' for the promotion of erudition, as well as for holiness of life; and that in his old age he lived to see his disciples, Rudolph Lange, Moritz, Count of Spiegelberg, Louis Dringenberg, Antony Liber, and above all Rudolph Agricola and Alexander Hegius, labouring with success for the revival of science in Germany and the Netherlands.¹

It is beyond our province to search for any further account of these men; the mention of them is sufficient to shew us, that à Kempis even in his advancing years was actively and usefully engaged; and that though deeply religious he was not without scientific culture himself, and had the power of inspiring a taste for it in others.

There is another of his disciples, however, whose history we must pursue a little, and to whom we would draw particular attention, since he afterwards became one of the most intimate friends à Kempis had in his old age, with whom he frequently conferred on the most important religious matters, and who loved to come and see the venerable saint from time to time so long as he lived.

In the earlier part of this work the Lives of several of those who were the spiritual friends and advisers of à Kempis have been given; so now, before we close the account of his life, it is pleasing to know something of one who was early influenced by him, and delighted in his society in after years. This is the more desirable because the writings of this man—who became famous in Germany, and whose teaching had no small share in preparing the way for the Reformation which followed, and was effected in Luther's time—are well known, and may in some measure guide us in ascertaining the views held by à Kempis in his latter days. It will at least shew us that à Kempis was instrumental in forming the religious mind of one who was the foremost in sowing the seeds of those truths which wrought so great a change afterwards in the religious world; though it must be admitted, from what appears, that à Kempis

¹ Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation*, p. 135.

himself probably derived much benefit and fresh light on Divine things from his intercourse with his somewhat courageous, energetic, and still youthful friend.

This person was none other than John Wessel, who has been justly called 'the forerunner of Luther,' and whose sterling piety, and extraordinary insight into religious knowledge amidst the corruptions that prevailed, are indisputable. The great Reformer himself was so astonished with some of the writings of Wessel, that in a preface which he wrote to them, in the Leipsic edition, 1552, he says, 'By the wonderful providence of God, I have been compelled to become a public man, and to fight battles with those monsters of indulgences and papal decrees. All along I supposed myself to stand alone; yet have I preserved so much animation in the contest, as to be everywhere accused of heat and violence, and of biting too hard. However, the truth is, I have earnestly wished to have done with these followers of Baal among whom my lot is cast, and to live quietly in some corner; for I have utterly despaired of making any impression on these brazen foreheads and iron necks of impiety.

'But behold, in this state of mind, I am told that, even in these days, there is in secret a remnant of the people of God. Nay, I am not only told so, but I rejoice to see a proof of it. Here is a new publication by Wessel of Groningen, a man of admirable genius, and of an uncommonly enlarged mind. It is very plain he was taught of God, as Isaiah prophesied Christians should be. And as in my own case, so with him, it cannot be supposed that he received his doctrine from men. If I had read his works before, my enemies might have supposed that I had learnt everything from Wessel, such a perfect coincidence there is in our opinions. As to myself, I not only derive pleasure, but strength and courage from this publication. It is now impossible for me to doubt whether I am right in the points I have inculcated, when I see so entire an agreement in sentiment, and almost the same words used by this eminent person, who lived in a different age, in a distant country,

and in circumstances very unlike my own. I am surprised that this excellent Christian writer is so little known. The reason may be, either that he lived without blood and contention—for this is the only thing in which he differs from me—or perhaps the fears of our modern Jews have suppressed his writings as heretical.

‘I recommend therefore the pious reader to peruse this book with care and consideration. The writer peculiarly excels in judgment; and moreover is admirably calculated to improve the judgment of his reader. Lastly, those who are displeased with my asperity will meet with nothing of that sort in Wessel to offend them.’

Now Albert Hardenberg, the biographer of Wessel, founding his accounts upon what he had learnt from the contemporaries of Wessel, states that in his early years the fame of Thomas à Kempis was attracting many youths, and had the same effect upon Wessel. This was not long after the time when Thomas had written his book on the ‘Imitation of Christ;’ for Wessel, who must have been among the first to read it, averred that it had given him his first vigorous incitement to piety, and again, that it had given him the first taste for true theology.¹ Whether it be that it induced him to go into the neighbourhood where the author lived, or that he read the work after he came thither, does not appear, but the desire to be near this saintly

¹ There are two places in which Hardenberg refers to Wessel’s being greatly influenced, and drawn towards Thomas à Kempis, by the reading of the *Imitation of Christ*. The one is to be found in the promiscuous notices of Hardenberg respecting Wessel, immediately after the letter of Wilh. Sagarus and the particulars respecting him, in which these words regarding Thomas à Kempis occur: ‘Cujus præter plurima alia etiam extat opus aureum *De Imitatione Christi*; ex quo libro Wesselus fatebatur se primum gustum veræ Theologiæ percepisse, eoque accensum, ut Zwollas admodum adolescens pergeret,’ &c. The other passage occurs in *Vita Wesseli*, on the fourteenth folio of the manuscript. After mentioning Wessel’s settlement at Zwolle, he proceeds, ‘Et attrahebat multos ad se fama optimi viri, fratris Thomæ Kempis, qui ex ædibus fratrum se in proximum Cœnobium, Montem S. Agnetis occultaverat, ubi multos pios libellos scripsit . . . Scribebat ea tempestate Thomas librum *De Imitatione Christi*, cujus initium est: qui sequitur Me etc.? Fatebatur autem Wesselus, se prima incitamenta pietatis ex illo libro percepisse,’ &c. This Hardenberg learnt among other things from the monks of Mount St. Agnes. Ullmann, ii. 271.

teacher induced him to enter the school at Zwolle, not long after the time that the celebrated John Cele had the charge of it. It is probable that there was not room for more at Mount St. Agnes, or we might have expected to hear of Wessel going thither.

Respecting Wessel's life at Zwolle, we learn that he lived in one of the houses for the numerous scholars that flocked thither from all parts : it was called the Littlehouse, which contained about fifty, whom Rutger von Doetenghem admirably governed as procurator. His neighbour in the adjoining chamber, with whom he could converse through a hole in the wall, was a pious youth, called John of Cologne, who had previously been a skilful painter and goldsmith, but had now come to Zwolle to devote himself, under the guidance of Dietrich von Herxen, to the spiritual life. Just as Thomas in his youth had been encouraged in his piety by the example of his zealous school-mate, Arnold of Schoonhoven, so was Wessel by that of John of Cologne. He instructed him in science, and received from him in return incitement to the fear and love of God. Wessel complied with the customs of the Brothers of Common Life, had his hair cut short, and wore the customary dress of the scholars with a hood. It was very soon perceived that he was possessed of more than ordinary talents, and at an early period of his stay at Zwolle, Wessel became an instructor of other young men besides John of Cologne. It was then customary at Zwolle to choose from among the scholars under-masters (*sub-monitores* or *lectores*). And having distinguished himself, Wessel was one of those selected for this office, and became *lector* to the third class ere his beard was grown. Moreover he is commended for not being elated by the distinction, but, on the contrary, complying, like the very humblest, with all the ordinances and discipline of the House, and even assisting the procurator in the services he had to perform.

He had already doubtless with many of the other scholars sought opportunities of going to Mount St. Agnes, and listening to the godly instructions of à Kempis, especially

when it was known that he would speak to any of those that came from the Brothers of Common Life ; but Wessel was not content with this, and it was probably now, after he had been appointed a *lector*, that he zealously sought personal intercourse with à Kempis, and became familiar with him, and even entertained the resolution to devote himself to the monastic life in the same monastery.¹ Reckoning the age of Wessel, when this happened, to be about twenty, that of Thomas à Kempis would be sixty ; and this difference between them as to age would perfectly agree with the position in which they respectively stood towards each other, when this loving intimacy was begun.

Wessel had to contend against bodily infirmity, having both weak eyes and a distorted foot ; but, nevertheless, great strength of intellect manifested itself whilst he remained at Zwolle. There is little doubt but that these circumstances contributed to give an introverted direction to his mind, and to confirm the strength and independence of his character, in opposition to the world without. His teachers developed within him the germs of a warm, heartfelt piety, and trained him to apostolical simplicity and strictness of morals. In all probability, however, zeal for science was more roused than was fully satisfied by the instruction which he here obtained. The further development of his mental powers and the acquisition of positive knowledge belong to Wessel's own independent exertions at a later period ; and hence in various particulars he exhibits the peculiarities of a self-taught man. And this, it is thought, led him, even when teaching his class, to deliver opinions which deviated from those usually held, and thereby stirred up adversaries. This is said to have induced him to write a defence of his conduct, and take leave of Zwolle sooner than he would otherwise have done.

It was then that he seems to have consulted Thomas à Kempis as to his future course, and to have entertained for

¹ ' Ut se insinuaret in *intimiorē notitiā* et *familiaritatem* domini Thomæ ; eo plane instituto, ut in eodem Cœnobio vitam monasticam amplecteretur.'—Hardenberg, *Vita Wesseli*.

awhile the thought of coming to live at Mount St. Agnes. This however was not to be. A difference between the two was already beginning to manifest itself, and had a counteracting and even beneficial effect on the mind of Thomas. When conversing with à Kempis about the choice of a vocation in life, it always seemed to Wessel as if there was too much superstition among the Brethren of the monastery. He therefore hesitated, since he thought that God seemed to have something else in view for him.¹ And, whether by the advice of à Kempis, who was ever open to conviction, and wished to follow the leading of Providence in all things, or solely from the final result of his own reflections, Wessel at last wholly abandoned his intention of becoming a Brother at Mount St. Agnes; and forthwith took his departure for the University of Cologne.

Though both were deeply imbued with the spirit of true religion, there was naturally a great difference between the character of à Kempis and Wessel, which clearly shewed that the same course of life was not alike suited for both of them, and that it was a wise determination which had been come to, that the latter should pursue his studies in foreign countries, and if need be, do battle for the truth. This difference and separation did not, however, alienate the one from the other, but seemed to draw them closer in the bonds of fraternal love, for the one felt there was a sterling worth and principle in the other, which might render their friendship a mutual advantage to both. Both of them were pious Christians, and in this respect à Kempis, as the elder, might well exercise a powerful influence over the younger Wessel, in the way of exciting, kindling, and devoutly enlightening his mind. They likewise in common possessed a sincere zeal for knowledge. The relation, however, between piety and science, sentiment and life, were very dissimilar in their respective minds.

¹ 'Sed cum super ea re sæpius cum Thoma dissereret Wesselus, visus semper sibi est quædam nimium superstitiosa in illo cœnobio animadvertere : itaque cunctabundus omnia egit, Deo haud dubie alio illum dirigente.'—Hardenberg, *Vita Wesseli*.

In à Kempis piety and devotion greatly predominated. With an irresistible predilection, he plunged into the contemplation of Divine things. Satisfied with Scripture and a few good books, unconcerned with the changes of system taking place on the world's arena, and with no wish to intermeddle or reform the ecclesiastical statutes, he was perfectly content when, under all the restraints which the Church imposed, he was enabled to win the hearts of men to the love of God. In Wessel, on the contrary, the thirst for knowledge and the desire for action greatly preponderated, without impairing the piety of his heart. His wish was to master everything the age offered as worthy of being known. He learned other languages, he changed systems, vigorously fought his way in the world, disputed, strove, contradicted the reigning opinions, and burned with desire to apply his hand to the improvement and reformation of the corrupt state of the Church. In one word, Thomas à Kempis was a God-loving, devout and childlike soul ; Wessel was a self-reliant, inquisitive, masculine, and reforming spirit.

There are two titles or names which Wessel obtained, which shew how he was regarded among the learned of his day. According to the custom of the age he was wont to be called 'Basilus,' probably because he much resembled Basil in contending for the truth. The other peculiar title he got was 'the Master of Contradiction.' This latter designation is said to have been given him by his adversaries on account of his love for paradoxes and his spirit of opposition to the prevailing opinions ; thus the Dean of Naeldwick, Jacob Hoeck, writing to Wessel later on in life, says, ' I can discover from your letter only one thing which, in my opinion, does not become a great man, viz. that you are of an obstinate disposition, and in all you deliver aspire at a certain singularity, so that it is generally believed you were justly called "the Master of Contradiction." And do not doubt that even the peculiarities of so great a scholar as you are, give offence to many.'¹ His friends, however,

¹ *Wesseli Opp.* ed. Groning. p. 871.

said that the title referred to the talent he possessed for sound and able contradiction—in other words, to his skill in controversy, which was certainly far-famed.

The character of the times in which both these men lived, and to which we must shortly draw the attention of the reader, while it was calculated to call forth the spirit of Wessel to oppose, and overthrow if possible, those errors and corruptions that had crept into the Church and seemed to overlay the truth, and poison the stream of life, had at the same time, in some measure, an opposite effect on à Kempis, in making him shrink from taking any active part in what was going on in the Church, outside his own immediate sphere ; or in taking any prominent attitude in contending against the abuses which everywhere brought dishonour upon Christianity. He did not feel called upon to fight against the prevailing evils in this way ; he knew better his own line of duty and capabilities, and in what manner he could best serve the cause of true religion ; and he feared lest he should become ruffled in spirit, be drawn from the special work he felt he had to do, by the opposition of those in authority to reform the Church, or in more publicly denouncing the degeneracy of the age which he felt himself powerless to correct. The course which he took, and that which he seemed best qualified for, was not open conflict and bold denunciation, but to give his chief attention quietly to remedy the corruptions which lay around him, to create as far as he could a better state of things in the little circle wherein he moved and where he had influence, to crush the evil by a superabundance of good, to promote personal piety, as the best antidote against overflowing immorality, to foster true devotion and love to Christ in earnest, faithful hearts, from whence the living spirit of Christianity would, working as leaven, spread itself abroad to others on the right hand and on the left. And this course which he took—besides showing the peculiar bent of the mind of à Kempis—will sufficiently account for his dislike to discuss with others in general the disorders that were everywhere rife in the Church ; and rarely, if ever, to

speak with any approval of, or to allude in any of his works to, the Papal system which was then struggling for the ascendancy in all directions, often by equivocal if not immoral means: for if he does not impugn any of the ecclesiastical dogmas of the period, neither does he attempt to establish or defend any of them. He looks to the Primitive Church, the model of what the Church should be.

‘The whole outward structure of the Church,’ says one, ‘is for him as if it had no existence; he cleaves to the living spirit within it, and to that alone.’ In his numerous writings he does not so much as mention the Pope by name, and only once or twice alludes to him for the purpose of saying, that even he, a mortal man, and his leaden bull, like all earthly objects, are nothing.¹ And further, he condemns the accumulating of wealth in the Church and monasteries, as well as all simony, pluralities, and secularising religious bodies.²

The reformatory spirit in Wessel, however, was a chief feature of his character, and early displayed itself. ‘From his boyhood he had always something singular and inwardly repugnant to all superstition.’³ And subsequently he himself was induced to use these characteristic words: ‘The true philosopher would fain remodel all kingdoms and nations, and bring them into a better and more prosperous condition, if their rulers and princes would but lend an ear to his admonitions.’⁴ It is not to be wondered at that this peculiarity of mind should also evince itself in Wessel’s connection with Thomas à Kempis. It even appears to have developed itself more consciously in the mind of the youth, in contrast with one whom he so highly revered. Several remarkable traits of it have been handed down. À Kempis, as the reader will have already seen, was in some degree a worshipper of the Virgin Mary, and exhorted

¹ *Hortulus Rosarum*, iv. 3. ‘Omnia sunt nulla, Rex, Papa et plumbea bulla.’ The papal bull is again alluded to in *Vallis Liliorum*, xxv. 3; Ullmann, ii. 160.

² *Vallis Lil.*, xxv.; *De Imit. Chr.*, i. xvii. 2; Epist. vi.

³ Hardenberg, *Vita Wesseli*, at the beginning.

⁴ *Scali Med.*, i. 4; *Opp.* ed. Groning.

young Wessel to show the same special reverence for the Blessed Virgin. On one occasion when he was doing this, Wessel replied, 'Father, why do you not rather lead me to Christ, Who so graciously invites those who labour and are heavy laden to come unto Him?' À Kempis was no less zealous in fasting, as indeed he was in all parts of discipline; and as he was once inculcating it upon Wessel and some of the other youths, he received from him the answer, 'God grant that I may always live in purity and temperance, and fast from sin and vice!' Even here, in these early occasions of intercourse, Wessel's opposition manifests itself to be genuine and sound. It proceeds not from unbelief, but from a deeper, purer, and more enlarged faith; and consequently it is not merely negative, but likewise positive: and this à Kempis knew how to appreciate, for he had himself helped to plant the spiritual germ of faith in the soul of the youth. There is still more to say, as the biographer of Wessel relates. 'Thomas, on hearing this and similar remarks, was filled with wonder, and took occasion to change some passages in his writings, which now shew fewer traces of human superstition.'¹ It is easy to imagine that the open, candid, pious youth did exercise such an influence upon one, whose mind, although mature, had yet been narrowed by the cloister, and that in this way a more searching inquiry after truth, growing up under his eyes, had reacted upon à Kempis himself. And it is probable that as Wessel grew up à Kempis clung to him the more, and trusted the more to his independent judgment.

Ullman, from whose work much of the information and many of the remarks in this chapter are drawn, intimates, in his zeal for Wessel, what we must here take exception to, viz. 'that in this case'—i.e. Hardenberg's remark about Thomas changing some passages in his works—'we should have to thank Wessel, that the book of the "Imitation of Christ" is purer from many ingredients of the Catholicism of the time than the other writings of Thomas;' but he somewhat qualifies the inference by saying, 'and although

¹ *Vita Wesseli*,

this were ascribing too much to the reaction of the pupil upon his spiritual Father, still the fact would remain, that Thomas appreciated and did justice to the youthful Wessel, even when he was contradicted by him.'¹ Now there is quite sufficient evidence to shew, that no material alteration was made in the 'De Imitatione Christi' after the year 1425, so that there is no valid ground for supposing that, however à Kempis was affected by the reforming principles of Wessel, he was led to make any change in this chief work of his on this account. For in the above-named year, when Wessel would not be more than five or six years old, a copy of the 'De Imitatione' was deposited in the Mother-House of the Brothers at Windesheim, which differs very little from that which is now generally received as coming from the hand of à Kempis. There is no need therefore to depreciate the merit of Thomas in this work to enhance the reforming influence of Wessel. There are many of the writings of à Kempis, as well as the 'Imitation,' which make no allusion to the Virgin Mary, or any superstitious customs, while in other treatises of his these matters are distinctly brought forward. It is a difficult matter to know how far à Kempis was affected by some of the errors and superstitions of the day. He never went to the excess which Romanists in these days do. And mostly his mind seems so full of Divine truth as drawn from the Word of God, that he never notices in most of his works those superstitious practices which he elsewhere acknowledges and draws attention to. From which it would appear that they were not regarded as of vital importance or essential to his religious teaching; yet being imposed by authority, and considered part of the Church's teaching, à Kempis would at times occasionally introduce and urge them upon his readers; for it must be admitted, that he was more ready to believe what was generally received by the Church at that time, than to doubt, question, or oppose it. Yet from the intimation given by Hardenberg of his having altered some passages in his writings, which shewed traces

¹ *Reformers before the Reformation*, ii. 274.

of superstition, it is clear that he was open to conviction, ready to admit the truth in its integrity, and to correct what was erroneous. And it is probable that many of the writings of Thomas, in which these superstitious usages are mentioned, were not intended to be published, or would have been corrected by him, had they not already gone forth to the world. Not a few great men in riper years have seen fit to alter their views and opinions on certain matters, whilst their grand principles of life have remained intact, and are not the less to be respected on this account. And so it evidently was with Thomas à Kempis to some extent, though it is impossible to say definitely in what or how far.

And yet, when we consider the intimate fellowship which Wessel kept up with the inmates of Mount St. Agnes, whilst living abroad in the world, discussing and disputing with learned men on the several controverted subjects of the day—how it was his custom annually to repair to the scenes of his early education, at Zwolle, and the contiguous Monastery at Mount St. Agnes; and that there was no spot in his native land where he loved so much to dwell as this, where he was surrounded by the memory of former years, especially that of his spiritual Father and friend, à Kempis¹—when we remember that Wessel, while sojourning there for some time, wrote one or two books of devotion for the Brethren at their request;²

¹ In his fragmentary notices after mentioning the ‘Collegium Agnetanum’ as the dwelling-place of Thomas à Kempis, Hardenberg proceeds to say, ‘Quod Wesselus propterea reverenter colebat et nullo loco libentius, quam illic erat, quotiescumque apud nostrates versabatur.’—*Cod. Monac.* fol. 12.

² The *Scala Meditationis* was dedicated to his acquaintances, the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle. For their particular use he also wrote the *Exempla Scalse Meditationis*. The former contains his views of the way in which spiritual meditation should be conducted, fixing the thoughts, directing them to the highest and worthiest objects, and thereby strengthening, ennobling, and purifying the mind. He also treats of the active and contemplative life, and of the various means of training the mind by scientific exercises, such, for example, as mathematical and logical reasoning, the study of rhetoric, &c.; and at the same time succinctly develops the principles of these exercises. In the latter work there is an application of the maxims delivered in the former one—pious meditations upon the most important subjects of Christianity, and

and that after the death of Wessel many of his writings were found deposited at Mount St. Agnes¹—it is not unreasonable to presume, seeing à Kempis lived more than thirty years after he first made the acquaintance of Wessel, that the latter often consulted Thomas upon the subjects of the works that he published, probably submitted some of his writings to him for his opinion and approval ; and that in the writings of Wessel we behold the more distinctly religious views and sentiments of à Kempis in his riper years. This at least is the idea which the scattered hints of the relation between the two leave upon the mind.

À Kempis doubtless perceived, in the views and writings of Wessel, but a further development, and a more accurate regard to the principles, of the religion which he had himself enforced ; he must have recognised the necessity for a more searching inquiry into some of the peculiar

directions for self-knowledge, and the appropriation of the Gospel salvation—they consequently are ascetical works, like the treatises of Thomas à Kempis. The Brethren on Mount St. Agnes no doubt already possessed such *Scale Meditationis*, composed, wholly or partially, in metre, and as it appears also arranged for singing. But they had supplicated Wessel, whose spirit they revered, to write for them new devotional meditations, which might be better calculated than what they had hitherto used for fixing their wandering thoughts, and directing them to the highest objects. Wessel gratified their wish, and having regard to, and perhaps also partially founded upon, the *Scale Meditationis* which had hitherto been used at Mount St. Agnes, he gave to these a new form and arrangement.—Ullmann, *Ref. before Ref.*, ii. 570, 571.

¹ These were afterwards destroyed or lost. Wessel seems to have learnt much from the work of one Rupert, a pious Abbot of the Monastery of Deutz, near Cologne, in the twelfth century. This man, like Thomas à Kempis, held the Bible in peculiarly high esteem, and deviating from the usual course of the Schoolmen, referred all things, especially his doctrinal and ascetic writings, to its authority. He held views at variance with the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and inveighed much against the corruptions of his age. Wessel was much attracted to such a man ; and made large extracts from his works, and from the writings of the Benedictines, to which he appended his own thoughts and observations, and thus formed a great collective work under the title of *Mare Magnum*, which he afterwards carried about with him on his travels, and continued to extend during the whole course of his life. Hardenberg gives the most precise information respecting this book of Collectanea. He says, ‘Excerpterat multa ex libris Ruperti, quibus alia tum etiam addidit ex aliorum libris ; postea et sua non pauca addiderat : postremo omnes suas cogitationes eruditas et sacras in illas rhapsodias congesserat, quæ commentarii justi facti sunt demum, quas solebat, ipse vocare Mare Magnum ; quæ utinam nobis non periissent.’—Ullmann, *Ref. before Ref.* ii. 284–286.

dogmas and customs at that time prevalent in the Church, to ascertain whether they were in keeping with the standard of Truth which they alike upheld ; and he must have seen and acknowledged that Wessel was peculiarly fitted—far more than himself, and that he was as it were raised up by Providence—to call the minds of men to contend against error, and to set forth the Truth, respecting these points, more widely in the world, and in greater accordance with the Word of God. And so long as Wessel maintained—nay, strongly contended for—the authority of the Bible as the ultimate appeal on religious matters, so long as he upheld and advocated what tended but more clearly and decisively to promote the glory of God, the exaltation and love of the Saviour and His grace, the cultivation of personal religion, the bringing of self into greater conformity to the will of God and to the example of Christ, the necessity of humility, loving-kindness, unworldly-mindedness, and such like graces of the Gospel, he would have the warm approval of à Kempis. The latter was not of that disposition to become envious or jealous of another's superiority, or to be chagrined, when he saw himself surpassed by one who had come to him for ghostly counsel. Nay, as a Father over a son in the faith, he could rejoice in the work Wessel was doing, and in beholding his influence among men extending, and think the more highly of him. Through Wessel's career, à Kempis could behold with joy the coming of a brighter day, the dawn of the future Reformation.¹

And whether we regard the line and views taken by Wessel as the action of a free, independent, inquiring, and reforming mind, or as the advanced progress of a deep and enlightened thinker, going beyond the limits of his early teachers, it is clearly evident, that his peculiar religious convictions were those which sprung out of his early piety, his earnest regard for the Bible, his devotion to Christ, and his desire to follow Him, and do Him service to the utmost of his power, which were kindled and fostered in his mind

¹ See Appendix at the end of this chapter.

by à Kempis, and other Brethren of the Common Life. The radical disposition of mind, which had thus been formed within him in youth, remained unaltered. He changed and developed its form, but retained the substance. The permanent basis of his religious and theological life involved, as its two constituent elements, a profound attachment to vital, plain, and Scriptural Christianity, and a great originality and freedom of research, to find out upon what human authority traditionary maxims and old superstitions rested. His freedom of mind was rooted in the firm soil of genuine godliness; and this godliness manifested its vitality by never shrinking from bringing the truth to light, and unmasking and scattering error. 'Truth,' says Wessel, and he says it in the fulness of his heart, 'truth has been the object of my pursuit since the days of childhood, and is more so now than ever, because through truth alone lies the way to life.'¹

On the ground of this pure love of truth, which emancipated his mind from all selfishness and obstinacy, Wessel waged war against what was evil and erroneous. 'The conflict for truth,' he says, 'is of such a kind that, whether as the victorious or vanquished party, I grow in the liberty of the children of God. For it is a promise of Truth that she will make free those who abide in her. And this is the battle which the Lord Jesus has commanded us to fight, that we may enter into His kingdom.'² From the same root grew the delight which he took in solid and pertinent disputations. 'I derive quite a peculiar pleasure,' he writes, 'from the disputations of acute minds, for in these I always either learn or teach; feeling myself under a double obligation, on the one hand, towards the wise, of learning from them, and, on the other, towards the instructing those who are teachable.'³ And in another letter he says, 'The Chaplain of Adwerd has promised, that

¹ In the treatise 'De Indulgentiis,' addressed to Hœck, cap. vi., *Opp.* p. 887.

² 'De studio et pietate quærendæ veritatis,' *Opp.* p. 863.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 857.

if I will but go and meet him, he will heal me of mere controversy. I therefore implore of you who dwell upon Mount St. Agnes, if you desire my cure, to dispute with me, and never to cease, except either as the conquering or conquered party. Force out the confession of truth, which clears off all scores.'¹ It could not well be otherwise than that the Brethren of this monastery must have become deeply impregnated with the views of a Reformation, when they were frequently brought into close contact and fellowship with such a mind and spirit as Wessel possessed.

It would be very difficult clearly to enunciate Wessel's views upon all the controverted and fundamental points of religion, without transcribing a large portion of his writings; and as it would be travelling too far out of the way to do this, however valuable it might be, I must not do more than give a brief glance at a few of the subjects in which he develops the teaching of à Kempis, or in which he opens out to him a wider, and in some few instances more correct views of the truth. And I am induced to add these few examples of Wessel's teaching, because he may be regarded as a connecting link between the 'Brothers of Common Life' and the Reformers, between Thomas à Kempis and Luther; this is distinctly inferred by Ullmann;² and it

¹ In a letter to John of Amsterdam, then living at Mount St. Agnes. *Opp.* p. 864.

² Speaking of the popular element that paved the way for the Reformation, Ullmann says, 'We discover it particularly in its religious and moral aspect, in the schools of the Mystics, and to a still greater extent, and in combination with a lively zeal for the social improvement, instruction, and training of the people, among the Brethren of the Common Lot (Life). Both of these, the Reformatory element in Mysticism, and still more, because still more widely operative, that in the Institute of the Common Lot, and in its chief representatives, of whom *Thomas à Kempis* is one, I have been at great pains to depict.' (Preface to *Reformers before the Reformation*, p. xxii.) And again, 'The Brethren of the Common Lot are one of the most pleasing phenomena in the annals of spiritual life. *Gerard Groot* and *Thomas à Kempis* awaken general sympathy by their very names. The German Mystics, in their connection with the Reformation, are of the highest importance—an importance which has not been hitherto sufficiently estimated—while the most superficial acquaintance with the theology of *Wessel* suffices to secure for him in a pre-eminent sense the title of *Luther's* precursor' (*ibid.* p. xxiii.) And once more, after stating that the most finished product of Mysticism was in Thomas

will serve to shew that the 'De Imitatione Christi,' from which Wessel was first drawn to embrace vital Christianity—containing as it does the essential teaching of the mystic theology of the Brothers—was in a remarkable degree a precursor of the Reformation, as I have elsewhere stated ;¹ since in a dark and dry and barren age it kindled anew the fire of pure devotion in the soul, and asserted the principle that our profession of religion was nothing unless it led us to adopt its precepts ; and thus the life of Christ within the soul was awakened, which led in due time, as a spiritual result, to the search after a purer faith, and to the discovery and acknowledgment of it, even as Christ foretold it would be under like circumstances, when He said, 'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.'

In spite of some differences Wessel shews himself a true spiritual Brother of Thomas à Kempis, in his ardent love and study of *the Holy Scriptures*. Like à Kempis he prized above all things a simple and natural interpretation of them, and an application of their precepts and principles to a man's own life and moral improvement. 'Whoever interprets a passage of Scripture,' he says, 'must adhere to the words of the text, and give no forced explanation. For every forced explanation, which, from fear of objection, deviates from the terms of the canon, must be suspected of heresy.'² And again, 'The man who, in reading the Bible, does not daily learn to think less of himself, and does not grow in self-dislike and self-humiliation, reads it not only in vain, but even not without danger.'³ It is true

à Kempis's wisdom of life and love, he says, 'As Mysticism in general, especially the more Scriptural and practical sort, was of high importance for the theology of the Reformation, we shall trace its progress and development down to Thomas à Kempis, and its ramifications into Germany. Nay, we shall meet with it again in the history of Wessel, for the tree of his theology, though stretching upwards to the light in a higher degree than that of à Kempis, still imbibed from this soil the best portion of its strength' (*Reformers before the Reformation*, Introduction to vol. ii. p. 5).

¹ See *Authorship of the 'De Imitatione Christi,'* p. 26.

² Treatise 'De Purgatorio,' *Wess. Opp.* p. 845.

³ Hardenberg, sec. 10.

that Wessel did not wholly reject the authority and traditions of the Church, or the dictates of her teachers and Councils, but he insists that both should always be referred to Scripture, and only when in accordance with it be recognised as valid. He says, 'To speak plainly: so long as it appears to me, that the Pope, or the School, or any society, maintain any opinion contrary to the truth of Scripture, my first duty is to adhere with the utmost care to the Scripture; but then,' speaking respectfully of those in authority, 'as it is not probable that men of such eminence will fall into error, it behoves me diligently to investigate the truth on both sides, though always with greater reverence for the Holy Scriptures than for any human averment, from whomsoever it may come.'¹ And in another passage he remarks 'We ought to observe and obey the doctrines laid down by Prelates and Doctors, in the way recommended by Paul, i.e. so long as their authors sit in the seat of Moses, and teach consonantly with him. When, however, they propound what is either foreign or contrary to his doctrine, it is not obligatory upon believers to receive it, or anything, at variance with the law of perfect freedom. For we are the servants of God, not of the Pope; whose servants, however, we should be, were we bound by all his dictates whatsoever: but it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." . . . It is only when the clergy and doctors agree with the true and sole Teacher, and lead us to Him, that we ought to listen to them; for he must be blind and foolish who follows a blind and foolish guide.'² And again he says, 'The will of the Pope and the authority of the Scriptures by no means stand on the same level; for the will of the Pope must be regulated by the truth of Scripture, and not the truth of the Scripture by the will of the Pope.'³

Like Thomas à Kempis, Wessel sees in *love* the confluence of all that is great and glorious in Christianity.

¹ *De Indulgent.*, cap. i. p. 879.

² 'De Potest. Eccles.,' *Opp.* pp. 760, 761.

³ *De Indulgent.*, cap. viii. p. 892.

The love of God and Christ to man, Wessel holds to be the chief subject and proper power of the Gospel ; and, in the same way, on the other hand, the love of man to God, which God's love kindles and feeds, seems to him, the way to truth, the foundation of all good, the source of purity, and the standard of justification and blessedness. Love unites Divinity and humanity ; it produces peace ; it accomplishes the Divine will, not as a legal work, but with heavenly freedom ; it lends to this present life all its worth and weight ; and at the same time, like faith, from which it is inseparable, is a germ of life eternal, unfolding itself more and more fully and beautifully for ever and ever. 'There is no life but in love,' he says, 'no holy life but in holy love. We must henceforth love the Firstborn of the Brethren, and by Him be brought back to the Father of love. For unless we love Him with pure hearts we cannot see His face. . . . *Love* waits for no command, for he does not love at all who waits until he receives, and only acts after he has received an order.'¹ And in another beautiful passage, 'What can I give to Him, Who gives all to me ? The violet of spring exhales its fragrance to the fostering sun ; the winged gnat sports in its beams ; but to Him Who is my Spiritual Sun, what can I give in return ? In truth, to render Him anything of my own is impossible, and towards such a Lover would be dreadful ingratitude and neglect of duty. . . . The only thing which I can give is a grateful heart. So then, O God, I am Thine, and all that is within me only exists because Thou hast willed it so.'²

The love of Christ has achieved the greatest things, and hence it must produce the most powerful effects. It has displayed the highest devotedness, and consequently must also possess the strongest attractive power. 'It is impossible,' says Wessel, 'frequently to revolve in the mind what thy Lord, thy God, thy Saviour hath done and suffered from love to thee, and not to love Him in return. To the cold heart the contemplation of a lover, and such a Lover as this, is a kindling fire, compelling it to love in

¹ Wessel's Letters, *Opp.* p. 861.

² *Scal. Med.*, exempl. ii. p. 383.

return. Whether he please or not, the man who considers and contemplates the love and tender passion of this Lover must love in return.'¹

Wessel expresses himself *on Faith* much after the manner afterwards adopted at the Reformation, and like to what is retained in the Articles of our Religion. And he also shews that the love of Christ, which so filled the heart of à Kempis, and upon which he expatiates so much, is the result and evidence of a living faith. 'We believe,' he says, 'both that a man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, without works; and that faith without works is dead. These, which are severally the doctrines of Paul and James, are different but not contradictory. Common to both is the persuasion that the just shall live by faith. But the faith meant is that which worketh by love. It is by works that the body shews itself alive; if these are not performed, it is looked upon as dead; and were a man to exercise none of the vital functions of the body, such as breathing, pulsation, warmth of heart, he would at once be reckoned lifeless. But although it is by the exercise of these functions that we judge him to be alive, it is not by their exercise that he lives. He lives by that which is their source, namely, the soul (*anima*); and the more, the greater, and the nobler the functions are, which he endeavours to elicit from himself, the more does he live. Inasmuch, however, as of all functions, love is the noblest, so, in this pilgrimage, the life of the lover is most desirable, even although he sits with folded hands, and does not, like Martha, occupy himself with outward business, but, like Mary, only sees and tastes how good the Lord is—the better part which she chose, and which was never to be taken from her. For no service is pleasing to the Lover unless when it springs from love as its source. Love, accordingly, is preferred above all duty and service. But as the source of love is faith, so is faith also acceptable for the sake of its offspring.'²

¹ *De Sac. Euchar.*, cap. vi. p. 659.

² *De Magnit. Passion.*, cap. xlv. pp. 550 and 551.

Wessel, however, never considers faith as the actually operative cause of salvation. This he finds only in Christ and the Divine Word manifested in Him. For further on in the same work from which the above passage is taken he says, 'It is not as if the mere faith of the believer (intrinsically) is so acceptable, that it stands on a level with the rectitude and purity of angels, but because it has pleased God to give to believers a higher righteousness, rectitude, and purity, than the angels can boast.¹ And again, paraphrasing the words of Christ, he says, 'Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you, not through the word of your faith or your confession.'²

As Thomas à Kempis insisted much upon *spiritual* as well as *sacramental communion* with God, and that in the latter there can be no reception of Christ unless the heart be ready and disposed to receive Him, so we find similar views entertained by Wessel. Let a few short passages suffice. 'There is between the sacramental and the spiritual eating this difference, that the former without the latter is unprofitable, nay even worketh death; whereas the spiritual eating is always profitable and tendeth to life. Besides, the spiritual communion by pious aspirations is more profitable than the sacramental, at least in respect of that which is eaten and drunk.'³ 'To feed on the Body and Blood of Christ in this way (by faith and love) is better than were we ten thousand times to receive the Sacrament at the altar from the hand of the priest with insensible hearts and cold affections, that we might be in the State of Grace.'⁴ 'In the Sacrament He is given *to* us, as fully as in His passion He gave Himself *for* us; so that the oblation, which He then made in our behalf—provided we grow in continual remembrance of it—is of real benefit to us, and becomes not merely His, but ours; and ours, too, the righteousness and obedience of the Offerer.'⁵

¹ *De Magnit. Passion.*, cap. xlv. p. 551.

² *Ibid.* 746.

³ *De Orat.*, viii. 6, p. 149.⁴

De Sacram. Eucharist., cap. 29, p. 703.

⁵ *Ibid.* cap. 21, p. 693.

To proceed to a few other points, Wessel laid little stress upon *oral confession*, if there were no real repentance in the heart. The Brethren of Common Life, it will be remembered, promoted, as a better way, spontaneous *private* confession of faults among themselves. Wessel goes further, and opposes the Romish views; and is indignant that oppressive works of *Penance* should be imposed upon a true and contrite heart, instead of the cheerful announcement of grace. This he especially appeals against in the example of the Prodigal son. 'Him the Father received at once. He did not blame, or upbraid, beat, or put him into prison; but ran to meet him, kissed and embraced him, wept for joy, clothed him with a robe, ordered shoes to be put upon his feet, &c. What Papal Indulgences were necessary to this returning penitent? Full return to God, therefore, is the only worthy fruit of penitence, and conversion is of itself satisfaction.'¹ Wessel does not scruple to call *Indulgences* a pious fraud; nay, with still greater warmth of feeling, 'an error and a lie.'² Although Wessel admits the existence of a *Purgatory* after death, it is quite another thing to that entertained by the Romanists. He endeavours to be guided by Holy Scripture on the question, and speaking of the fire which shall try every man's work of what sort it is, alluded to by St. Paul, he says, 'The fire of Purgatory is that which rather purges than punishes the stains of the inner man, that accompany us even after our departure from the body.'³ 'It is such a condition, that if we knew it we should rejoice. It follows that they are not in misery, not under the rod of the tormentor, or in the fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels.'⁴ He then instances the case of the Penitent thief, being in Paradise—not in torment or hell.

Although there are, as might be expected, some points in which Wessel holds somewhat different views from the Reformers, yet, as it has been said, 'he is in general so

¹ *De Sacram. Penit.*, p. 796.

² *Epis. De Indulg.*, cap. 1, p. 876, and *ibid.* cap. 7, 889.

³ *De Purgat.*, p. 829.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 833.

perfectly orthodox, and has so clear an insight into the essential doctrines of Christianity, that it would not be easy to point out any material difference between Wesselus and the Church of England in most articles of the greatest consequence.' ¹

Wessel was much opposed to anything like formality in prayer, or mere mechanical devotion; all should be free and proceed from the heart. He therefore rarely had a book for his private devotions, and never used a rosary. For this reason the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes, who were strict in their adherence to ecclesiastical customs, once upon a time asked him 'if he never prayed at all.' To which he replied, 'With the help of God I make it my endeavour to be always praying. Moreover, I daily repeat the Lord's Prayer. That, however, is a prayer so pure and so sublime, that it would suffice were I but to say it once a year.' ² This prayer was regarded with devout enthusiasm by à Kempis, as we have already shewn. And Wessel, in the introduction to his exposition of the Lord's Prayer, manifests a like esteem for it. 'This prayer possesses, I know not what secret efficacy above all other prayers, and promises to him who carefully uses it a great fulness of devotion. For a fertile soil, beneath the sun of spring and summer, yields not so abundant fruit as this prayer of Christ in the mouth of the glowing supplicant. It calls, however, for an attentive and diligent cultivator.' However averse he was, then, to lifeless repetitions of prayer, he was not opposed to a certain order and custom or habit of devotion, provided it possessed inward life and truth. 'I do not reject vocal prayer in itself, but I condemn the multitude of such prayers, and the haste with which they are said, as this is a hindrance to attention and lively desire.' ³ 'He who merely utters the words of prayer, uses his voice it maybe, but does not pray, even though he adhere to the rules prescribed by the Church; still, as his

¹ Milner, *Church Hist.*, iii. p. 423.

² This is told by Gerard Gelderhauer in his short *Vita Wesseli*.

³ *De Orat.*, i. 6, p. 13.

soul is empty, what he does is not prayer. In prayer more depends upon the warmth of the affections and the approximation of the soul to God, than on great and sublime thoughts.’¹

The life of Thomas à Kempis, as it has been set forth, was pre-eminent, not only for his imitation of Christ, but for his holding loving and sacred intercourse with the Saviour, and in meditating upon His Life and Passion. One of Thomas’s larger works consists of thirty-six discourses or meditations on the incarnation of Christ, and the various other events of His life, His passion and His resurrection, which contain quite a valuable treasury of devotion. In like manner Wessel lays great stress upon the loving contemplation of the Life and Passion of Jesus, as will be seen from the fact that he not merely in his several writings reverts from time to time to the subject, but has composed several treatises which are exclusively occupied with it. Wessel particularly illustrates the importance and efficacy of the knowledge and habitual contemplation of the life of Christ. ‘Being a Life so exalted and holy, it is transfused into us, in the same measure in which we unite ourselves to Christ by reverence and love. Christ imparts His Life to those who believe in Him. His name must be exalted above all else in our hearts. This, however, is only done by the most perfect love which casts all else into the shade. Christ is our *Pattern* which has been lifted up from the earth: and whosoever looks to Him is lifted up, and obtains the right direction. The love of Christ is a consuming fire, and cannot co-exist with a heart which is cold and uninflamed. No one comes to Jesus but through Jesus, and according to His rule.’² Elsewhere Wessel remarks that, ‘the Life of Christ has a really prefigurative character, only in so far as it is *also imitated*. A pattern which is not imitated is useless, dead, and unfruitful.’³ It has, therefore, been well observed that we have here another important

¹ *De Orat.*, iii. 3, p. 47.²

See *De Mag. Passionis*.

³ *Scal. Medit. Exemp.*, 334, 371.

point of connection between Wessel and Thomas à Kempis.

There are many other ways in which Wessel proved himself a true disciple of Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of Common Life, in his pursuit of personal piety. One apposite anecdote, however, must now suffice, since it shows his character very clearly, and how he practically carried out the sentiments which they held. When Pope Sixtus IV. ascended the papal chair he promised to grant Wessel, being a noted scholar of his day, any request he should make. Wessel's request was that he, the Pope, would so discharge the duties of his elevated position, that when the Great Shepherd appeared it might be said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord.' 'That must be my care,' said the Pope. 'But do you ask something for yourself.' 'Then,' rejoined Wessel, 'I beg you to give me out of the Vatican Library a Greek and a Hebrew Bible.' 'You shall have them,' said Sixtus; 'but, foolish man, why don't you ask for a bishopric, or something of that sort?' 'For the best of reasons,' said Wessel, 'because I do not want such things.'¹ In this he was like the Brothers, who eschewed dignities and emoluments.

Wessel died in 1489, about eighteen years after the death of Thomas à Kempis, with whom he had continued to hold an affectionate intercourse for nearly thirty years, visiting him in the monastery at Mount St. Agnes at stated periods. Thomas à Kempis had imbibed, as we have seen, from the founder and senior Brothers of the Common Life, the best principles of German mysticism, such as induced him to be animated and led by the Holy Spirit in all faithfulness, as guided and taught by the Word of God, and the example of the primitive Christians; and to no man was Wessel more indebted, as we have shewn, for the first principles of religion, which were afterwards strengthened and developed, than to Thomas à Kempis. 'The authors and founders of the Brotherhood of the

¹ Hardenberg, *Vita Wesseli*; Milner, *Ch. Hist.*, iii. p. 427.

Common Life,' says Ullmann, writing respecting the close of Wessel's life, 'were now dead. Respecting the man, however, who was chiefly instrumental in determining the inward bias of his mind, both by the positive influence which he exercised upon it, and by the opposition which he called forth, we can scarcely cherish a doubt. It was *Thomas à Kempis*;' ¹ and then Ullmann proceeds to produce positive testimony upon this point. Thomas had endeavoured to set forth, disseminate, and perpetuate by his writings, and the training of others, the holy principles and precepts of Divine truth as he had received them in the clearest, most concise, and forcible manner; so did Wessel in his turn strive to promulgate and inculcate widely by his writings and teaching the same essential truths which he himself had received, gaining more light, vigour, and determination as he proceeded.² These truths,

¹ *Reformers before the Reformation*, ii. p. 269.

² The early Brothers of Common Life had been celebrated, as the reader will remember, for their endeavour to promote education in the elementary schools, and likewise for training young men for the ministry and a religious life; Wessel seems to have laboured in like manner, for in another part of the country he endeavoured to revive these schools, and encouraged advanced scholars to prepare themselves for future usefulness. 'He stimulated them,' says Ullmann, 'in the study of Hebrew, explained to them the Psalms, pointed out to them the mistakes in the Vulgate, answered their questions, and solved the difficulties they proposed, and occasionally read aloud a passage from the original Hebrew.' 'Wessel everywhere endeavoured,' he says, 'to operate upon the young, and sow the seeds of improvement in their souls . . . and prepared their youthful minds for the rise of a brighter day to theology, which he never doubted would come at last, but of which he only caught a distant view, as Moses saw the promised land, but was not permitted to tread its long-expected plains. Like Luther, to whom indeed it was an easier task, not merely because his lot was cast in an after period—and time moved forward then as rapidly as now—but also because he bore within him, in a still larger measure, the power to create a new theology, Wessel used to foretell, with the most perfect certitude, the speedy and total overthrow of scholasticism. To one of his favourite pupils, John Oestendorp, afterwards Canon of the Church of St. Lebuin at Deventer, who applied to him for advice about his studies, he said: "Young friend, you will live to see the day when the doctrine of Thomas (Aquinas), and Bonaventura, and such other modern dialectical theologians, will be rejected by all truly Christian divines." Upon another occasion he declared: "It will come to pass ere long that these irrefutable teachers, with their hoods and cowls, both black and white, will be forced to retreat within due bounds." In this way Wessel guided the current of scien-

communicated and spread abroad throughout the country by souls kindled by the fire of Divine light, were as seeds sown in the earth, which though they might lie hid for awhile, would in time germinate, spring up, and bear fruit ; which ultimately proved an important factor in the great Reformation begun in Luther's time, who first put in the sickle of the harvest which a previous generation had laboured after, and had been the means of fostering. For it is no small mistake to imagine that the Reformation burst forth and sprung into existence without much previous preparation ; men's minds had been long looking and longing for it, a glowing determination had been gathering strength that the errors and corruptions which prevailed in the Church must be eradicated, and the publication and diffusion of Gospel light and life must have free course, and be upheld. Wessel foresaw and foretold this, and also laboured for it.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XXVII.

THE author of these volumes has been accused of trying to make out, without sufficient grounds, that the writings of Thomas à Kempis in no small degree paved the way for the Reformation. It is said, 'Of course, all really spiritually-minded men of the Middle Ages did, both in life and morals, utter and enact a protest against practical corruptions.' Leaving one to infer that the teaching of à Kempis had no more influence in bringing about the Reformation in the sixteenth century than any of these, for, continues the writer, 'a great part of Mr. Kettlewell's argument might, in our judgment, be employed to prove that numbers of undoubted Romanists were Reformers before the Reformation. Look at Anselm,' &c. Now that I am not singular in the view I have taken, and that other eminent writers have held the same, viz. that Thomas à Kempis, in the revival of spiritual Christianity by his teaching, was with others sowing good seed, which sprung up

tific life into a new and better channel, and, as an inevitable consequence, gathered around himself, as the animating centre, a circle of admiring friends and pupils. . . . Persons of all ages from the surrounding districts resorted to the old and experienced man in quest of advice and instruction.'—*Ref. before Reformation*, ii. 351, 352.

after many days and bore fruit, which contributed in an essential degree to bring about the glorious Reformation in Luther's time, I shall endeavour to show by reference to what some learned Germans say, who were well acquainted with the history of those times, and the secret causes of that great change.

M. Gelzer, in his 'Sketches of the Life of Luther,' says : 'The more internal efforts at reformation had their deepest foundation in two of the most important spiritual events of the fifteenth century. The spirit of Christianity (liberated from its disfigurement and disguise, from its fetters and materialism) was recognised and estimated at its real value, in its original truth and freedom ; but this liberation had been rendered possible only through the greater power obtained by the spirit of religion, and by a more vivid comprehension of the original history of Christianity. The greater power of the spirit of religion, and this more liberal comprehension of history, must be looked upon as the two most powerful springs of spiritual reform before Luther. From the depths of this religious feeling, and the more consciousness inspired by it, as well as from the oldest written documents dating from the establishment of the first Church, the Christian spirit drew the means for its renovation, and the Church for its new birth ; and never have historical knowledge and religious inspiration united in a nobler labour, never have knowledge and faith formed a more beautiful union, than in this dawn of the Reformation. .

'The German Christian mysticism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries appears, upon a more general review, as the first important step towards the Reformation, a first grand effort for the spiritual re-establishment of Christianity. It is indeed the natural soil for the growth of the religious freedom and profound depth of feeling obtained at the Reformation ; and for a long space of time Luther himself is essentially indebted to it for intellectual nourishment and growth. It insists, on all occasions with great emphasis, upon individual experience, and the life of religion in the heart ; it seeks the innermost depths of the soul ; and by the sacrifice of an active and devoted love an immediate union with the Supreme Being, immaterial and essential.

'Among the most important and influential German advocates of this movement before the Reformation are Suso and Tauler (the author of "German Theology"), in the fourteenth, and Thomas à Kempis in the fifteenth century. The first two drew from the fulness of a spiritual life, rich in experience, such a power of living words, that they influenced men's minds at great distances, and produced a deep impression, particularly in the cities on the Rhine,

the principal scene of their labours, and awakened in numberless individuals a desire for higher attainments.'

And speaking of the fifteenth century this writer says :—

'In conclusion, we have yet to mention, among the German co-operators in the Reformation before Luther, the author of the "Imitation of Christ" ("Nachfolge Christi"), Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), who died twelve years before Luther's birth. The history of his mental progress and influence point in their *origin* to Ruisbroek (1293–1381), in their *effects* to Wessel, and through him to Luther. . . .

'We have no traces, it is true, of any immediate important influence exercised by the writings of Thomas à Kempis upon Luther, but it may be traced through the man who must be accepted as the spiritual connection and mental point of junction between Thomas à Kempis and Luther—John Wessel (1419–1489), the greatest German theologian among the advocates of the Reformation in the fifteenth century. Wessel had received his early education, and become acquainted with the grey-haired Thomas à Kempis who lived in the Monastery of St. Agnes, at the neighbouring House of the Communist Brethren at Zwolle. The little work, the "De Imitatione Christi," which Thomas was then engaged in writing, became to him, Wessel himself states, the powerful incitement to piety, and a foundation of sound divinity. This true religion of the heart, this love without selfishness, nourished in the young Wessel the warmth indispensable to the fulfilment of the task which eventually made him the German reformer of the fifteenth century, the spiritual precursor and theological brother in the faith of Luther.'

Schlegel also confirms what has been said of this movement, and shows how it was that after a time it lost its vigour, and did not sooner ripen and become more general. Speaking on the corrupt state of society in the fifteenth century, and the revival of religion, he says : 'Yet even in these periods . . . the spirit of Christianity shewed itself independent of, and superior to, the temper of the times ; and between these opposite eras, we meet with works displaying a clear and beautiful simplicity of expression, united with the utmost purity and depth of ascetic feelings. Among several others, I need only cite the German, Thomas à Kempis, whose most celebrated work has become a manual of devotion for all European nations, while those who know the philosophic spirit which reigns in his other writings can well recognise in this the same clear, masterly mind, which, throwing off

the abstruse forms of the school, pours itself forth in a most lovely simplicity of diction.

'I may be permitted to cite,' he continues, 'this glorious exception of mind that, amid the degenerate science of that age, rose into the pure atmosphere of Christian Philosophy, inasmuch as it serves to throw a light on the general spirit of the times. Had that mild light of moral truth and Divine charity not been then so rare an exception, had that spirit of Christian morality been somewhat more widely diffused, the violent commotions in the following generation would not have occurred ; for they would have had no motive, nor object, nor any possible source of existence. But in direct opposition to that pious Fleming (Thomas à Kempis) there was a great Italian writer, who gave the tone to the moral and political opinions of his age, and exerted the mightiest influences on his times, both as a moralist and a politician. I allude to Macchiavelli, who may serve as a proof that the maxims and principles of pagan antiquity, with which the scholars of that age were imbued, were not confined to the departments of art and of imagination, or of mere erudition, but had a very powerful influence on politics ; and, however much one may attempt to excuse or explain away the design of one of his works ("The Prince"), still all his other political writings clearly and evidently show that he was actuated by no other maxims of state-policy than the old Roman and pagan principle of grasping, inexorable, and selfish cunning. This writer announced only with greater clearness and precision what were already the prevailing principles of his times, and was thus the means of bringing these principles to fulness and maturity.'¹

In a still more pointed manner does Ullmann speak of Thomas à Kempis as one of the pioneers of the Reformation, though he did not consider him to be entirely free from the errors of his time, and did not further the movement in the demonstrative way in which it was taken up by others. 'The reader may now ask with astonishment,' he says, 'shall this quiet mystic, wholly immersed in the contemplation of Divine things, this recluse, obedient, rigidly Catholic monk, shall he be placed in the ranks of those *who paved the way for the Reformation* ? We boldly answer in the affirmative. Thomas à Kempis was not, indeed, a precursor of the Reformation in the same sense as Wessel and others. He was not one in every respect ; but he was so in several very weighty and important aspects—we may even say with truth, in the very core of his being.' And after showing in what respects he was deficient, and

¹ Schlegel's *Philosophy of History* (Bohn's), pp. 394, 395.

how he held some views at variance with the Reformation in its more perfected state, he continues : ' We have to point to certain particulars more important and positive. In the first place, Thomas everywhere insists upon the Christian principles of spirituality and freedom, which formed the basis of the Reformation. Besides, the spirit of his fraternity led him to do many things involved in the general current which brought about the Reformation. To him the *inward life*, the disposition of mind, is the great matter. No work or external thing is of any value except through love. Where there is genuine love it sanctifies all. In like manner, he knows nothing more exalted than *freedom*. Freedom of mind is in his eyes the supreme good in the spiritual life.¹ To be detached from all creatures, dependent only upon God, but in this dependence perfectly master of one's self and of all other things, this is to him the great mark, which the spiritual man ought to strive to reach. It is true that Thomas is not *intentionally* a Reformer, for he does not apply these principles outwardly. But he nevertheless is a Reformer ; for he desired the self-same objects as Luther and his friends, the only difference being that the latter also prosecuted them to their outward consequences. But besides, in the spirit of the fraternity of which he was a member, Thomas did many things to pave the way for reform. These consisted chiefly in zealously inculcating the reading of the Bible, and the transcription of copies of it, a work in which he himself took an active part, in laying the chief weight not upon Moses or any sort of law, but upon Christ and His Gospel, upon grace, repentance, faith, love, and the appropriation of the spirit of Scripture by the Spirit of God in the soul, in labouring much for the religious revival and instruction of the people by sermons and *collationes*, and in practically evincing a lively concern for the literary, and especially the philological, education of the rising generations. All this included the germs of future evolutions, although the harvest which they bore was such as Thomas never anticipated, and, if foreshown to him, he would scarcely have recognised as the growth of his own seed. We have to observe, that under Thomas's immediate influence a man was trained up in whom we find these germs developed to a very high degree. We speak of *John Wessel*.' ²

¹ 'Libertas spiritus principale bonum in vita spirituali.'—*Vita Ger.* xviii. 3. 'Fili, ad istud diligenter tendere debes, ut in omni loco et actione, seu occupatione externa sis *intimus liber*, et tui ipsius potens, et *sint omnia sub te, et tu non sub eis*.'—*De Imil. Chr.* iii. 38, 1.

² Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation*, ii. 155, 160, 161.

It is obvious from these passages that in the judgment of several writers, well qualified to form an opinion on the matter, Thomas à Kempis was, however unconscious of it he himself may have been, a great power in the pre-Reformation period—one of the freshest and most fruitful springs of that flowing stream—which, suppressed for a time by outward circumstances, eventually gathered force, and culminated in the work of the Reformation. In the more practical development of a Scriptural and spiritual Christianity it is not difficult to trace his influence in the movement which led to a reformation, and the part he took in preparing the way for it, whilst labouring in calm retirement. What he did, and what he led others to do, as we have all along shown, was to draw forth from the Word of God, by a pure and plain interpretation, irrespective of the scholasticism or errors of the age, its vital spirit, and the essential points of its teaching ; and to once more recognise in Christianity a Divine power to create a new life in the inmost recesses of our spiritual being, continually imparting fresh strength or grace according to our needs, and guiding us from the Atonement to Sanctification—imbuing us with the spirit of more faith and love, and prompting us to fulfil from the heart with a willing mind the royal law of God—of loving Him with all our soul and strength, and our neighbours as ourselves, and thus gradually affecting and changing the outward life and daily conduct of men. Now ‘the extent to which this constitutes the very germ of the Reformation,’ says one of the aforementioned writers, ‘can scarcely be conceived, by any other means than an acquaintance with the spiritual manifestations which preceded it. Its forerunners were almost more than its agents, under the dominion of a Christianity petrified into law, a sort of legal ecclesiasticism.’

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Further details of ecclesiastical history—Attempts to reconcile the Bohemians—Horrible massacre of veterans who were entrapped—Terms of peace with them rejected by the Pope—The attempted reunion of the Churches in the East and West—The danger to Constantinople from the Turks.—Union with the Latin Church the only terms on which help can be obtained—The Greek Emperor and Ecclesiastics attend a council in the West, and partly consent—The Greek Church repudiates the Union, since it means submission to papal authority—The Turks assault Constantinople—The noble attitude of Constantine—The brave defence of the city before it is taken—Subsequent events—Account of the Moravian Brethren.

BEFORE I enter upon the closing years of the life of Thomas à Kempis it may be desirable to take one more glance at what had been going on in the Church at large for more than thirty years. Thomas à Kempis had the opportunity of being well informed of what was transpiring ; and he was not only sadly interested in all that happened, and was probably often deeply grieved at heart ; but these things may have in no small measure greatly contributed to dispel from his mind some of those few remaining superstitious views which he held, and brought him, in his declining days, more into harmony with the sentiments of the later Reformers. That à Kempis did alter his views on these points we are assured, from what has been alluded to in the previous chapter, through his intercourse with Wessel. And the course of events which we have to record must have helped to do this also.

Taking up the thread of ecclesiastical history where I left off in chapter xxii., where we beheld the Bohemians fighting for their religious independence, and refusing to submit to papal dictation, even when enforced by the sword ; I must notice that Pope Martin XV., feeling that he could not well escape from keeping the promise he had

given at Constance when called to the papal chair, summoned another Council of the Church at Basle. And to it some of the leading Bohemians were invited. Thither they went with stout hearts, having blind Procopius at their head, to consider terms of reconciliation with the Church. This was in the early part of the year 1433. The deputies of Bohemia resolutely contended for two things more particularly. First, that the laity should be permitted to receive the cup in the administration of the Holy Sacrament. Secondly, that the Word of God might be freely preached to them. Two other points were pleaded for besides, viz. the abolition of clerical endowments, and the punishment of heinous crimes by the magistrates without the benefit of the Clergy, or grants of Indulgence. The discussions were protracted nearly two months ; and at the end of this time, finding that they were no nearer coming to terms of peace than they were at the beginning, and that words of bitterness and defiance began to be bandied about, the deputies withdrew, and returned to give an account to their countrymen.

Some members of the Council were anxious, however, to make a further attempt to bring the Bohemians into conformity with their views, and proposed that a solemn embassy should be sent to Prague, to reconsider the contested points. This was done ; they met the deputies and renewed the discussion ; but finding that the embassy designed only to amend the articles pleaded for, so as to alter their meaning and altogether to destroy their force, the larger portion of the Bohemians wholly rejected the attempts, and refused to accept the propositions except in their plain and natural sense. After this it became obvious that no terms of reconciliation could be adopted ; and another attempt must be made to exterminate the heretics in Bohemia. So unsuccessful, however, had their previous attempts been, that the papal party resolved to see what could be done by intrigue and cajolery. Now there were some of the Bohemians called Calixtines—so named from their insisting on the use of the *cup*—who were willing to

submit to terms of peace in all other matters, provided the Holy Communion might be received by them in both kinds ; this the Council were now willing to allow them, and would not proceed against them provided they took no part in supporting others who held more extreme views. There were, moreover, in Bohemia some who still secretly held with the clergy and monks that had been driven out, and formed a party in their favour. These took the part of the Council, and fomenting dissensions in the country, a civil war ensued in 1434. Maynard, a notable Bohemian, ably led the party who were in favour of submission to the Council ; and so adroitly did he manage matters that, attacking their opponents in a favourable moment, he succeeded in defeating them. Thus it came to pass that many of those who had most resolutely withstood the crusades of the imperial forces now fell into the hands of Maynard. They were numerous, and dreaded by their conquerors ; and Maynard, acting under the direction of the Roman Catholics, now resorted to a most diabolical stratagem for their destruction.

Among the prisoners, continues Waddington, from whom this account is chiefly drawn, there were also several who were innocent of any previous campaign against the Church, and who were neither hated as rebels, nor dangerous as soldiers. These it was the design of the Catholics to spare ; and the better to distinguish them from the veterans of Ziska, they caused it to be proclaimed that the Government intended to confer honours and pensions on the more experienced warriors, the heroes of so many fields. These were accordingly invited to separate themselves from less deserving companions, and to withdraw to some adjacent buildings, where more abundant entertainment and a worthier residence were prepared for them. Unsuspicious of evil, they fell into the trap. They believed what was promised ; and then it came to pass—but here we must let the Roman Catholic historian himself tell the tale of horror. It is Æneas Sylvius, who afterwards became Pope ; no friend of these Protestants, for he seems to gloat over the narration of this revolting and fiendish act of cruelty. ‘Many thousands,’

he says, 'of the Taborites and Orphans,¹ entered the barns assigned to them ; they were men blackened, and inured and indurated against sun and wind ; hideous and horrible of aspect ; who had lived in the smoke of camps ; with eagle eyes, locks uncombed, long beards, lofty statures, shaggy limbs, and skins as hardened and callous as to seem proof, like mail, against hostile weapons. The gates were immediately closed upon them ; fire was applied to the buildings ; and by their combustion, that ignominious band, the dregs and draff of the human race, at length made atonement in the flames, for the crimes which it had perpetrated, to the religion it had insulted.' And all this was done by those who professed to be followers of the lowly and blessed Jesus, the Prince of peace, who came not to destroy, but to save. This holocaust of human beings — not heathens, but devoted followers of the same Saviour — was made because these men chose to think differently to them upon certain points in religion, and were resolved to hold fast the faith of the Gospel as they had received it, or to die for it.

This monstrous and execrable act of cruelty, though it made the hearts of many quail, did not quench the devotion of others to the cause for which they suffered. The Taborites were still strong enough to make a stout resistance, and the Emperor Sigismond felt it desirable to negotiate terms of peace with them. A compact was consequently entered into at Iglau in the year 1436, by which the Bohemians were to be allowed to retain the use of the cup, on condition that they yielded the other points. They were weary and broken down by deadly struggle and longed for peace. The business was concluded with the sanction of the Council, and portions of ecclesiastical property were to be restored to the Church. It was now fondly imagined that the days of persecution and bloody warfare, which had lasted for upwards of twenty years, were at an end ; the people congratulated themselves at the prospect,

¹ Two sections of the Bohemians who had boldly contended for their religious rights.

and when the Emperor entered Prague he was hailed with loud acclamations of joy. But, alas! all this manifestation of amity and satisfaction was soon to be turned into sorrow: a cloud arose in the clear sky, which foreboded further storms.

The Pope refused to sanction the concordat. And though the Emperor had promised that Rokysan—who had been chosen by various sections of the people, and was much trusted and respected by them—should be appointed to the see of Prague, the Pope would not ratify it. The deadly feud must still go on. And we here see but another instance of that fatal influence of papal authority, always interfering, and, for the sake of her own ambitious or avaricious designs, disturbing the peace of the world, and setting people and nations at variance with one another. Upon the head of the papacy rests much of the guilt of the religious disturbance, persecution, and bloodshed which happened. Past experience had taught them how dangerous it was to resort to violent measures, so for years milder means were tried; and emissaries from Rome were sent to harass and seduce the people; and various ways were taken to bring the country into subjection to the Holy See; but they never succeeded. The most celebrated of these papal missionaries was John Capiotano, a Franciscan, who had gained great distinction in a spiritual campaign against the Fratricelli in the Campagna di Roma and March of Ancona, and had condemned thirty-six of them to the flames. He is described by Cochlans (*lib. x. ad finem*) as a little emaciated old man, full of fire and enthusiasm, and indefatigable in the service of the Church. The year of his embassy to Bohemia was 1451.

It was in this same year that Æneas Sylvius also paid a visit to Bohemia as imperial envoy. It is interesting to learn what he said of their manners and condition, for though no friend to them, he found a temporary asylum among them when in some danger from bandits: 'It was a spectacle worthy of attention,' he says. 'They were a

rustic and disorderly crew, yet desirous to appear civilised. It was cold and rainy. Some of them were destitute of all covering except shirts; some wore tunics of skin; some had no saddle, others no reins, others no spurs. One had a boot on his leg, another none. One was deprived of an eye, another of a hand; and, to use the expression of Virgil, it was unsightly to behold:—

—populataque tempora raptis
Auribus et truncas inhonesto vulnere nares.

There was no regularity in their march, no constraint in their conversation; they received us in a barbarous and rustic manner. Nevertheless they offered us hospitable presents of fish, wine, and beer. . . . On the outer gate of the city were two shields; on one of them was a representation of an angel holding a *cup*; as it were to exhort the people to this communion in wine,—on the other Ziska was painted as an old man, blind of both eyes, whom the Taborites followed, not only after he had lost one eye, but when he became a perfectly blind leader. Nor was there inconsistency in this.¹ I need not proceed further. These men, though not free from error, were sufferers for their religion. And however mean their outward appearance to more polished minds, there was something noble in them in the midst of their wretched and forlorn condition. What might they not have become if they had been allowed to enjoy their rightful liberty in peace, when in their outwardly bereft and maimed state they could manifest towards an enemy such forbearance and hospitality? It speaks much for them.

But how did this man, who afterwards became Pope, and had thus been protected and fed by them in an hour of danger, behave towards them? In his blind zeal to advance the papal power he suffered no obstacle to stand in the way of its imperious demands, he hardened his heart against them, and with an intolerant and malignant spirit compassed their destruction. Yet they were worthy of

¹ See letter 130, Waddington, *Chr. Hist.*, chap. xxv.

some consideration and respect. 'These wild and unseemly sectarians,' says one, 'nourished in their rude abodes opinions which were the glory of the following age, but which were indeed pernicious to themselves.' About seven years after Æneas had visited them, and upon his becoming Pope, he engaged their King Pogebrac to bring them to terms. Pogebrac himself was a moderate reformer, but extremely anxious to stand well with the papal powers, and was willing to carry out their behests provided they would still leave him and his people the *cup*, which he said he would never resign. Pogebrac consequently called a council of the various sections of the Hussites together, who condemned the extreme sentiments of the Taborites, and enjoined them to submit to the decrees they made. The Taborites, still thinking the views they held to be sound, refused to give them up; the King therefore proceeded against them, and destroyed them with such scrupulous exactness, that, it is said, not one was left alive. And yet this man whom the papists had bent to their inhuman purpose was hated by them, as much as if he himself had gone to the same extent as these very Taborites, because he would not wholly submit to their rule.

The attention of the papal party after this, however, was in some degree diverted from the persecution of the Bohemians by the threatened invasion of the Turks. Constantinople had been taken, and the safety of the adjacent countries in Europe was in danger of being overwhelmed. A peal of alarm rang through the Western Church, and the Court of Rome felt that they must come to the succour of those who owned their authority and looked to them for protection. And thus for a time all available forces were in request. After a while also another Pope arose, who was more concerned with the idea of enriching his own family than in subduing those who were accounted as heretics. And so for a time those who had had to fight for their religious liberty were left in comparative peace. But the idea of advancing the interests of the papacy and

maintaining its authority supreme was never lost sight of ; and so it was that when Paul II. ascended the papal throne, he again stirred up a violent crusade against the Bohemian Protestants, notwithstanding the ravages of the Turks, which needed all the military forces that could be brought forward to resist them. He deposed the Sovereign of Bohemia, and granted the throne to another, on condition that he would root out the heretics from the land. But in this scheme he did not succeed. Yet for seven years of terror, those arms which might have chastised the foreign aggressor were fiercely turned against the Kings of Bohemia and their people. And it is no alleviation of the guilt of the pontiffs that those reiterated efforts were finally defeated. I shall not attempt to enter upon the harrowing details of this period, nor shall I proceed with the history of these Bohemian wars any further, since we have come to the end of our limits, which terminate with the death of Thomas à Kempis in 1471.

An account of the times in which Thomas à Kempis lived would be incomplete, however, if some notice were not taken of two or three other momentous events which transpired, in which he could not but take a deep interest. One, to which allusion has just been made, was the siege and capture of Constantinople by the Turkish forces, and their subsequent inroad into other parts of Europe, endangering the safety of those countries which the Latin Church possessed, or over which she held sway. Another matter of some importance was the attempted reunion between the Churches of the East and West. This was in some degree connected with the former event. And recent wars and changes in our own times have invested both of these matters with peculiar interest.

When Constantinople was in danger the Emperor had not sufficient force to hold out long against the growing power of the Turks, which threatened the last remaining portion of his dominions. Succour must be obtained from the Western powers ; but the Pope of Rome, and indeed the whole of the Latin Church, were unwilling to support

his cause unless the Greek Church became united with them ; and as the latter were hardly pressed, some of its prelates were willing to join the Emperor in the attempt to restore a union between the two Churches. Many, however, viewed the design with suspicion, knowing full well that the result of it would be to sell their liberty, and be brought into subjection to the papal see, for the sake of obtaining the promise of help.

The breach between the Greek and Latin Churches was of long standing, and had been attended with most disastrous and disgraceful consequences, and to this disruption I must for a moment refer. Its origin may be traced back to the time when Constantine the Great removed the seat of the imperial government from Rome to Constantinople, and the subsequent jealousy which seemed ever to prevail between the prelates of the two sees about the rule and authority which each should have. Upon Constantine's taking up his residence at Constantinople and subsequently, especially in the time of Justinian, the Bishops of that Church were advanced to higher dignity and invested with greater and more extensive authority. The Bishops of Rome, or Popes as they were sometimes then called, were summoned to Constantinople at the will of the Emperor, or rebuked by the Emperor's generals in Rome itself. The degradation to which they were reduced, the intrigues of the Court at which they took part, and the base venality to which some of them resorted in the reign of Justinian and his successors, is truly lamentable. During this time the Patriarch of Constantinople had assumed the title Œcumenical or Universal Bishop,¹ a term which

¹ 'This claim,' observes Milman, 'rested on the civil supremacy of Constantinople. The Western empire had perished, Italy had sunk into a province, Rome was a provincial city, Constantinople was the seat of empire, the capital of the world ; the bishop of the capital was of right the chief pontiff of Christendom. The pretensions of the successors of St. Peter were thus contemptuously set aside ; the religious supremacy became a kind of appanage to the civil sovereignty ; it lost its permanence, its stability, its independence ; it might fluctuate with all the vicissitudes of political dominion, or the caprice of human despotism.' *Latin Christ.*, book iii. ch. vii.

implied his being head over all ; and this title was both acknowledged by the laws of the empire and confirmed by the Council of Constantinople. All this was very galling to the Bishop of Rome. He remonstrated against this title being applied to any man, and regarded it as blasphemous, but he had little weight in the Council.

Before the removal of the imperial seat to Constantinople, the Bishops of Rome had held a leading position. The ancient city, once reckoned the mistress of the world, held universal rule ; and so long as the Emperor resided there the Bishops exercised great influence, especially among the churches of the West. The Church in Rome also had been renowned for its piety and liberality, and the churches in other parts had not looked to her in vain for help and counsel, and her Bishops were often appealed to for their decision in vexatious and perplexing questions. It was not without much mortification, then, that she was for a time compelled to take up a secondary place in the Church. She vexed herself, and struggled hard to regain her former leading rank, and as time went on, and the Western powers gradually emancipated themselves from imperial domination, the Pope of Rome once more took up a prominent position, at least in the West, until in the time of Charlemagne and his successors, his authority became paramount. The Patriarch of Constantinople was still acknowledged as the head of the Eastern Church, whilst the Pope of Rome was received as the head of the Western Church. Thus they became rival powers, one wishing, and secretly scheming and aiming at the subjugation of the other, so as to rule supreme in the Church.

Now there were several important matters in which the Eastern Church was distinguished from the Western. In the multiplied changes of temporal power which took place in Europe, the Popes of Rome had not only managed to emancipate themselves from subjection to civil authority, so that in most of the Western nations, as well as at Rome, the Church was a rival power to, and in, the State of the several countries, but had also assumed a supremacy

over every secular authority. In the East, however, the Greek ecclesiastics still remained subject to the civil power ; and though the Patriarchs of Constantinople sought like the Popes of Rome to gain an independent position, and make the Church a free republic, as in the Latin Church, they never succeeded. As the Church in the West advanced in wealth and power, so also did she seek to develop, or add to, the Articles of the Christian faith, whilst the See of Rome by gradual usurpations, which can be traced out from time to time, made the Pope of Rome lord paramount, not only of the Catholic Church, but to some extent over all the nations of Christendom. The Church in the East had, however, remained stationary, and in some ways retrograded or deteriorated. Still she held by the decisions of the first general councils of the Church ; she protested against the innovations upon the faith of the Church ; still she allowed her clergy to marry, restricting the celibacy to the Bishops ; and she at once rejected the 'false decretals,' upon which the Roman pontiffs based much of their authority, as a forgery.

The Eastern ecclesiastics still held themselves as superior to the Western clergy in position and religious attainments, and considered that the Latin Church was much indebted to them for their Christianity. From the East the countries of Europe had first received the light of the Gospel, which had been brought by its missionaries. 'Africa, not Rome, gave birth to Latin Christianity,' says Milman. And again he says, 'For some considerable (it cannot but be an undefined) part of the three first centuries, the Church of Rome, and most if not all the Churches of the West, were, if we may so speak, Greek religious colonies. Their language was Greek, their organisation Greek, their writers Greek, their Scriptures Greek, and many vestiges and traditions shew that their ritual, their Liturgy, was Greek. Through Greek the communications of the Churches of Rome and of the West were constantly kept up with the East ; and through Greek every heresiarch, or his disciples, having found his way to

Rome, propagated, with more or less success, his peculiar doctrines. . . . All the Christian extant writings which appeared in Rome and in the West are Greek, or were originally Greek. The Epistles of Clement . . . the works of Justin Martyr down to Caius, and Hippolytus, the author of the "Refutation of all Heresies."¹ The seven general councils of the Church had been held in the East, and the Canons which were to be for the guidance and government of the Church were decreed chiefly by Greek ecclesiastics, and for the most part—those only being objected to which were aimed against the authority of the Roman See—were received in the West as authorised by the Church Catholic. The Eastern Church was therefore proud of her superiority in these matters, and as the Western Church thought, they blindly held to the traditions of the primitive Church, or, as Gibbon has it, 'blessed their own simplicity.' And whilst with envy and jealousy the Greek ecclesiastics watched the growth and increasing wealth and authority of the Churches in the West, over which the Pope held sway, they were intolerant in their feelings towards them, and regarded them with distrust and abhorrence; so that, however desirous some of the leaders in the Eastern Church might be to bring about a union with the Church in the West, from the dangers to which they were exposed by the invasions of the Turks, there seemed little probability that it would be brought to a successful conclusion.

The aversion with which the Greek Church regarded the Latin Church had been increased in the seventh century by the latter taking upon itself to add to the Nicæan Creed the word 'Filioque,' thus asserting that the procession of the Holy Ghost was from the Son as well as from the Father, which, however true in one sense, was not in the original Creed,² and thus gave umbrage to the Churches in the East, and kindled anew the flames of discord.

¹ *Latin Christianity*, book i. ch. i.

² The *Filioque* clause, as it is called, was added by the Council of Toledo in Spain, A.D. 653. It was far from being a General Council.

In the ninth century the bitter animosity between the two Churches was frightfully increased. Photius, an ambitious man, but otherwise a man of ability and excellence, had been promoted to the office of Patriarch of Constantinople. Ignatius, the deposed Patriarch, who had a considerable following, appealed to the Pope of Rome. Nicholas I.—one of the most ambitious and crafty of the Popes, who had by this time become a recognised power of some moment in Europe—saw a grand opportunity of advancing his authority in the East, and forthwith deposed his rival Photius. Another source of conflict arose about this time also, in both one and the other laying claim to jurisdiction over the Bulgarians who had but lately been converted to Christianity. Photius, with the support of the Court at Constantinople, remained victorious, and in the fierce contention which took place, he in his turn deposed the Pope of Rome, of which the Church in the West, of course, took no notice. Photius's triumph, however, was not long, for a change of fortune in the empire restored the deposed Patriarch ; but Bulgaria was for ever annexed to the Byzantine throne. Fierce quarrels afterwards arose between the Popes of Rome and the Patriarchs of Constantinople about the claim to jurisdiction over other places, which widened the breach between the two Churches still more.

The animosity between the Greeks and Latins was further inflamed and manifested in the three first crusades to the Holy Land. The armies of the Western nations had to pass through the territories of the Emperor of Constantinople, and they paid little respect to the persons or property of the inhabitants, who 'were insulted and plundered by the rude strangers of the West ; and the hatred of the pusillanimous Greek was sharpened by his secret envy of the bold and pious enterprise of the Franks. . . . Instead of a kind embrace, a hospitable reception from their Christian brethren of the East, every tongue was taught to repeat the names of schismatic and heretic, more odious to an orthodox ear than those of

a pagan or infidel.'¹ The crusaders were harassed by the people, and some of the Emperors of Constantinople are said to have 'conspired with the Moslems for the ruin of the greatest princes of the Franks.' The disagreement between the Greek and Latin Churches went on only from bad to worse. There were seasons when no active bitterness was exhibited. There were occasions when there seemed to be even an approach to amity and reconciliation. But all was hollow and treacherous, and a more horrible rupture was yet to come.

Many of the crusaders and those who accompanied them from time to time became settlers in Constantinople and in the provinces round about, acquired lands and houses, intermarried with the natives, and had churches after the Latin form. The princes of the East took wives from the Western kings. Honours and lucrative places were heaped upon the Latins, and an alliance sought with the Pope. The people and the Greek ecclesiastics, however, were indignant at the favours heaped upon foreigners, and the partiality shown to the papal ascendancy. And feeling themselves injured and disgraced by advantages acquired by strangers and heretics, they rose up in tumult to avenge the national dishonour. 'Neither age nor sex,' says Gibbon, 'nor the ties of friendship and kindred, could save the victims of national hatred and avarice and religious zeal; the Latins were slaughtered in their houses and in the streets; their quarter was reduced to ashes; the clergy were burnt in their churches, and the sick in their hospitals: and some estimate may be formed of the slain from the clemency which sold above four thousand Christians into perpetual slavery to the Turks. The priests and monks were the loudest and most active in the destruction of the schismatics; and they chanted a thanksgiving to the Lord when the head of a Roman Cardinal, the Pope's legate, was severed from his body, fastened to the tail of a dog, and dragged with savage mockery through the city. The more diligent of the strangers had retreated on the

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. lx.

first alarm to their vessels, and escaped through the Hellespont from the scene of blood. In the flight they burned and ravaged 200 miles of sea coast, inflicting severe revenge on the guiltless subjects of the empire. . . . On their return they exposed to Italy and Europe the wealth and weakness, the perfidy and malice of the Greeks, whose vices were painted as the genuine characters of heresy and schism. The scruples of the first crusaders had neglected the fairest opportunities of securing by the possession of Constantinople the way to the Holy Land; a domestic revolution invited, and almost compelled, the French and Venetians to achieve the conquest of the Roman empire in the East.¹

It was not long after this that the crusaders were again on the move, when they resolved to take Constantinople. After a siege of two months it was captured and the people subjected to horrible barbarities, so that even the Pope (Innocent) reproached the conquerors for their wickedness. After enduring a state of serfdom nearly sixty years, the people rose up against their tyrants and easily drove them from the city without much bloodshed. These terrible conflicts only the more deeply incensed the Greeks against the Roman Church, and it is needless to say that there seemed little hopes of any reconciliation.

This brief review of the schism, which had been widened and perpetuated between the Greek and Latin Churches through many ages, will show the difficulty, if not almost impossibility, of bringing the two Churches together again; at least so long as the Latins desired to have the supremacy and make the Greeks subservient to the Pope. The only true and fair ground on which a solid union of the two Churches could be made was by returning to the model and canons of the primitive Church, by the one acknowledging the other as an equal, and respecting the independence of his brother's episcopate in the government which he held. Michael Palæologus, the Greek Emperor, who had been instated on the throne of Constantine, fearing either the return of the crusaders, or the invading armies

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. lx.

of the Moslems, was anxious to be on good terms with the Western powers, made a base submission to the Pope, and in 1274 he constrained some of the Greek bishops to acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope at the Council of Lyons. This enforced submission was, however, of short duration. Ten years afterwards a council was held at Constantinople, and by a solemn decree the terms of agreement were annulled, and the Patriarch Joseph, who had unjustly consented to it, was deposed and sent into exile. We say 'unjustly,' because he had taken an oath before his own Church, that he would never consent to a union with the Church of Rome by which the latter should have the supremacy and pre-eminence.¹

We now come to the period in which Thomas à Kempis lived, and to the exciting events which happened. About the time when he entered the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes, Manuel, the son and successor of Michael Palæologus, visited the various princes of Europe in the hope of eliciting their sympathy and succour. Several of the provinces adjoining Constantinople had been taken by the Turks, and the city itself was threatened by a siege. So closely invested was the country around that the Emperor was obliged to leave by the sea. He went to Venice, Padua, Pavia, and Milan, where he was kindly received. In Paris great honours were paid him. In England he was courteously welcomed and entertained. Great reverence was yielded to him at Canterbury, and the King and his Court went out to meet and salute him on Blackheath, and escort him into London. He then after two years returned home by way of Germany and Italy. But in all he did he never sacrificed his honour or the interests of the Greek Church, of which he was the acknowledged temporal head. The Latin Church was then in the frightful throes of the Great Schism; one Pope being at Avignon in France, and the other at Rome. It was the year of the Jubilee when the Greek Emperor passed through Italy,

¹ See Mosheim, *Ecc. Hist.*, with notes by Maclaine, Cent. XIII. part ii. chap. iii.

but he sought not for any plenary indulgence, and greatly offended the Roman Pope by this slight, who accused him also of irreverence to the image of Christ because he would not worship it, and urged the princes of Italy to abandon the obstinate schismatic and leave him to his own ruin.¹

Constantinople, however, was saved during his absence, not by any of the friends he had courted, but by an unforeseen event. It was more like an interposition of Providence, to give the voluptuous city one more season for repentance and return to godly living. Another enemy attacked the Turks in the rear, and compelled their general to abandon the siege in all haste. The terrible Moguls had come down and taken Anatolia; and the defeat of the Moslem forces checked their insatiable ambition and greed of empire for a season, and saved the Constantinopolitan kingdom for fifty more years. For many years Manuel reigned in prosperity and without fear, employing his time in literary work and maintaining the religion of the Greek Church. His ambassadors at the Council of Constance attested, however, that the Turks had again become troublesome and dangerous. Manuel trusted also to strengthen his position by alliance with other countries, and married his six sons to Italian princesses. Friendly messages once more passed between the Papal Court and the Emperor; and the latter, in the face of approaching danger, expressed himself as desirous of immediate succour, and gave his consent to measures being taken for joining in a general council and decreeing an effectual reunion. The Pope, as usual, insisted upon the acknowledgment of his supremacy and the submission of the Greek Church. But it is evident that the Emperor never designed to yield to this, though, for the sake of keeping upon good terms with the Western powers to strengthen his position against the Turks, he was willing to talk long enough with them about a council and reunion. His sentiments are very apparent in a conversation he held in his old age with his son John, whom he had appointed to

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. lxvi.

succeed him, and with his chamberlain. 'Our last resource,' said Manuel, 'against the Turks is their fear of our union with the Latins, of the warlike nations of the West, who may arm for our relief, and for their destruction. As often as you are threatened by the miscreants, present this danger before their eyes. Propose a council; consult on means; but ever delay and avoid the convocation of an assembly which cannot tend either to our spiritual or temporal emolument. The Latins are proud; the Greeks are obstinate; neither party will recede or retract, and the attempt of a perfect union will confirm the schism, alienate the Churches, and leave us without hope or defence, at the mercy of the barbarians.'¹

His son did not see the wisdom of his father's words; and soon after he ascended the throne, upon the death of his father, he was desirous of completing the union of the East with the West. The Ottoman power was becoming daily more rampant, every province had been rent from the Greek empire one by one, and city after city opened their gates to the conquering foe. Still Constantinople was strongly fortified, and with brave hearts could long withstand the enemy, at least till succour from the West could arrive. The Emperor therefore accepted the proposal of the Pope to meet in a general council to be held in the West. Upon the death of Martin V., the project was not urged forward because Pope Eugenius was at first indifferent about it. The Council of Basle had, however, been called, and as the representatives of the Western Church, the members thereof invited the Emperor to their assembly. It is well known, however, that the Pope and the Council quarrelled. The Pope dissolved the Council, but the Council did not allow that he had any power to do this, and in turn resolved to depose the Pope, who defied their authority; and thus two parties again sprang up in the Western Church.

Now, as the Emperor of Constantinople seemed reduced to his last extremity, it was considered likely

¹ Gibbon, ch. lxvi.

that he would willingly submit to any terms imposed upon him by the West, and the Council and the papal party were anxious, one before the other, to obtain the desired submission from him. It was a strange anomaly that when desirous of union with the Eastern Church, the Church in the West should be in so divided a condition. 'Legates from the Council as from the Pope,' says Milman, who gives a very lively description of what happened, 'were sent to Constantinople. Contracts were entered into for galleys, if not hired, promised both by Pope and Council to convey the Byzantine and his clergy to the West. The crafty Greeks seemed disposed to bargain with the highest bidder, and with him who could give best security. The difficulties and advantages seemed singularly balanced. The Pope might admit the Easterns to unity, but Transalpine Christendom alone could pay the price of their laudable apostasy. Effective aid could be expected not from Italy, but from the Emperor (Sigismund was still on the throne) and from a crusade of all Europe.'¹ The Council were backward in providing means for the journey, and used threatening language. The Pope was obliging and respectful, and he had called another council at Ferrara, which was much more convenient for the Greek Emperor and his ecclesiastics, and by a forged document led them to believe that it had been transferred hither with the consent of the Council of Basle.²

After much perplexity the Emperor with some leading dignitaries decided to accept the offer of Pope Eugenius. Vessels were therefore sent from Venice for them; but in the meantime the Council at Basle had not been inactive, and had fitted out and sent other vessels to convey the Emperor and his party that they might appear before them. The papal galleys had not long arrived in the harbour of Constantinople before the fleet of the Council were seen drawing near. A battle between these two squadrons of ships, representing the opposing sections of

¹ *Latin Christianity*, book xiii. ch. xiii.

² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. lxvi.

the Western Church, was imminent ; for the papal admiral was commissioned to burn, sink, and destroy the other fleet, and went forth to meet them and put the order into execution. It was a sad spectacle to behold. The Emperor, however, with some difficulty prevented any actual conflict. His eyes were nevertheless opened to see the seriously divided state of the Western Church ; and he hesitated some time before he ventured to set sail. In November 1437, after three months' delay, the Emperor and his clergy embarked on board the Venetian galleys ; the Turkish Sultan, who was in fear of the Western powers, giving his promise that Constantinople should be secure and unassaulted during his absence. The Patriarch Joseph who accompanied the Emperor was an aged man, trembled at the perils of the voyage, and had great doubt as to the favourable issue of the visit, fearing that he, and about thirty of his brethren—among whom was the Primate of Russia, and the Patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem—would be overpowered by the voices of the Latins in the synod to which they were called. 'He yielded,' says Gibbon, 'to the royal mandate, to the flattering assurance that he would be heard as the oracle of nations, and to the secret wish of learning from his brothers of the West how to deliver the Church from the yoke of kings. The five cross-bearers, or dignitaries of St. Sophia, were bound to attend his person, and one of these, the great ecclesiarch or preacher, Sylvester Syropulus, has composed a free and curious history of the *false* union. Of the clergy that reluctantly obeyed the summons of the Emperor and the Patriarch, submission was the first duty, and patience the most useful virtue.'¹

After an anxious and wearisome voyage of two months and a half the representatives of the Greek Church arrived at Venice. Here great honours were paid to them ; the entertainment lasted another half month, and then by easy stages they arrived at Ferrara. The Emperor of the East went to the Cathedral in great state, and in the visit

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. lxvi.

he afterwards paid would not alight from his horse till he reached the bottom of the staircase ; the Pope advanced to the door of the apartment, refused his proffered genuflection, and, after a paternal embrace, conducted the Emperor to a seat on his left hand. Nor would the Patriarch descend from his galley till a ceremony, almost equal, had been stipulated for between the Bishops of Rome and Constantinople.¹ The latter was, therefore, saluted by his brother with a kiss of union and charity. Nor would any of the Greek ecclesiastics submit to kiss the feet of the Western primate.

On the opening of the Council, the place of honour in the centre was claimed by the temporal and ecclesiastic chiefs : the Greeks occupying one side of the Church, and the Latins the other. The Greek ecclesiastics, however, were surprised to see such a scanty attendance of the prelates and representatives of the Western powers. This caused some disappointment to the Emperor Palæologus, as well as to the Greek clergy, for the former could see but a faint chance of gaining the support he needed for the defence of Constantinople if the main strength of Europe stood aloof ; and the latter were fully persuaded that the object of the Pope was to establish his supremacy over them, and bring them into subjection. An exaggerated account of the Pope's influence had been purposely given them, and they were led to expect that as soon as the Council at Ferrara was begun, the great majority of those at Basle would flock thither. In this they were deceived, and the Greek Emperor intimated that they must await the arrival of other ambassadors and ecclesiastics, since the few present at Ferrara could not presume to form an Œcumenical Council. An adjournment of six months

¹ The reason of this appears to have been that an intimation had been sent to the Greek patriarch that the Pope trusted he would kneel before him and kiss his foot. This proposal he indignantly rejected, saying : ' If he is the successor of St. Peter, so are we of the other apostles. Did they kiss St. Peter's feet ? ' And finding that the honour that had been promised to him was not forthcoming, he threatened to return home.—Milman, *Latin Christianity*, book xiii. ch. xiii.

therefore took place, during which time the Greek clergy were left in a miserable plight, and subjected to much contumely and hardship. They were refused the use of any church for the Greek form of worship, and the miserable pittance promised to them was irregularly paid. Many of them wished themselves back in their own country, but they were now virtually prisoners.

During this season the leaders of the Council were not idle. A certain number of chosen doctors of the two Churches had been appointed to confer together upon the disputed points, and endeavour to come to some solution whereby a union might be established. The champions of debate on one side were Julian Cæsarini, the Bishop of Rhodes, and John, a doctor from Spain. On the other side was Marc of Ephesus, and Bessarion, Archbishop of Nice. Reports were spread about that the Greeks were charged with numerous heresies by the papal party. It was however agreed that there were only *four* articles of peace needful to settle before a reunion could be effected. These were:—I. Whether the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father and the Son, or from the Father alone. II. Whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used in the Eucharist. III. The nature of Purgatory. And, IV., whether the Supremacy of the Pope should be admitted. The first subject taken was that on Purgatory, as it was considered not so difficult a matter to settle. The Cardinal Julian laid down the doctrine of the Roman Church. Marc of Ephesus replied; but singularly enough his colleague Bessarion chose to differ from him. This was unfortunate, as it at once afforded the opposite party a way and means for overcoming the Greek Church. Bessarion was much courted and flattered, and, seeing that it pleased the Emperor as well as the papal party, he afterwards showed a readiness to yield on other points, and carried a large majority of the Greeks with him.

They had not time to discuss the other subjects before the Council was again reopened; and then the *Filioque* question was introduced. It is said to have been ably

argued by the Cardinal Julian ; who displayed remarkable talents and inexhaustible resources for maintaining the Latin view. The question was whether the word should stand in the Nicæan Creed, or whether some explanation of it should be given. The discussion waxed warm, and the contention was so great that it might seem as if the very existence of the Christian Church was at stake. Fifteen tedious sessions were held ; and as the plague had broken out in Ferrara, it was deemed advisable that the Council should be forthwith translated to Florence.

Florence was more convenient for a Council ; but as the intervening country was to some extent in the hands of their enemies, the translation was more like a flight taken by devious secluded and circuitous routes. The Council at Florence opened however on February 26, 1439, with great solemnity. The debate on the Procession of the Holy Ghost was renewed with great ardour by the 'ten theological champions,' until at last it began slowly to dawn upon their minds, that they were disputing more about the terms in which the doctrine should be stated, than the doctrine itself. The crux however was here. Should the Latin Church on her own authority be allowed to alter, and add to, the Creed of the ancient Church, without the sanction of the Eastern Church, and in defiance of the great Œcumenical Councils ? A great principle was here involved, which if violated, and a system of tampering with the Creeds allowed, might lead to incalculable evil. It was, as some imagined, a small point ; and yet, was the theory of the development of the Christian faith to be permitted by a section of the Church, though large and now of commanding influence, or was that blessed faith to be kept intact without any alteration or addition ? In the controversy the Latins were detected in putting forward a forged copy of the acts of the Second Council of Nicæa where the word 'Filioque' had been introduced. The Greeks were at a disadvantage in not having their copies of the ancient Councils and of the Greek Fathers at hand. Moreover they had become disunited through the part

taken by Bessarion, and became dispirited, seeing that their submission was a foregone conclusion. The Turks who had promised to leave Constantinople inviolate were now taking up a threatening attitude. The Pope was driven to great straits also by the resolute action of the Council at Basle, and he hoped that by bringing the Greek Church to submission they would overlook the past, and join in this great triumph. Both the Greek Emperor and the Roman Pontiff, therefore, were very urgent to have a settlement of the reunion of the Churches.

The discussion of the other points was proceeded with rapidly ; that on the Pope's supremacy caused much difficulty, however, because its practical consequences were foreseen in a further humiliation of the Greek Church. John Palæologus was fully aware how it might entrench upon his imperial prerogative, and, though anxious to bring matters to a conclusion, he would not consent to the proposition without stipulating for two safeguards : first, that the Pope should not be suffered to call a Council in his dominions without his approval and that of the Patriarch ; and secondly, that no appeals should be carried from the Patriarchal Courts to Rome. These points were hotly contested ; but the Emperor declared that he would sooner break off the negotiation, even at the last hour, than yield up what he contended for as his imperial rights.

Bessarion, one of the leading champions of the Greek Church at the first, and who was afterwards raised to the dignity of Cardinal in the Romish Church, 'engaged and seduced by the splendid presents and promises of the Latin Pontiff, employed the whole extent of his authority, and the power of his eloquence, and even had recourse to promises and threats, to persuade the Greeks to accept the conditions of peace that were proposed by Eugenius. These conditions required their consent to the following points :—'That the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son as well as from the Father ; that departed souls were purified in the infernal regions by a certain kind of fire, before their admission to the presence and vision of the Deity ;

that unleavened bread might be used in the administration of the Lord's Supper ;' and lastly, which was the principal thing insisted upon by the Latins, that 'the Roman Pontiff was the supreme judge, the true head of the Universal Church.'¹ The aged Patriarch Joseph, oppressed with trouble and the weight of years, had in the meantime died, counselling peace and union. And when the Greek ecclesiastics met in private to determine their course of action, the articles of union were approved by twenty-four and rejected by twelve ; the five cross-bearers of St. Sophia, who claimed to represent the deceased Patriarch, were, however, not allowed to vote, but in their place a number of inferior and obsequious persons were admitted. Greater unanimity was eventually obtained in deference to the will of the Emperor ; and only two were found faithful and courageous enough to protest against the articles, and to represent the voice of their countrymen, and of the Greek Church in general : Demetrius, the Emperor's brother, left in disgust, and would not be a party to the false union ; and Marc of Ephesus 'disclaimed all communion with the Latin heretics, and avowed himself the champion and confessor² of the orthodox creed.'³

It should here be mentioned that another treaty, of a different character, was drawn up and concluded at the same time as that of the Act of Union. By this it was agreed that the Pope should provide the Greeks with means for their return home,—'that he should maintain a standing military and naval force for the defence of Constantinople,'—'and that, if soldiers were wanted, he should

¹ Mosheim, *Ecc. Hist.*, Cent. XV. part ii. chap. ii. sec. 14.

² He had evidently some right to this term, for a legate of the Pope proposed that his allowance should be altogether withdrawn, and likened him to 'Judas,' who ate the Pope's bread and conspired against him. Others represented him as insane.

³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. ch. lxvi. 'I had forgot,' adds this celebrated writer in a note, 'another popular and orthodox protester : a favourite hound who usually lay quiet on the foot-cloth of the Emperor's throne, but who barked most furiously when the Act of Union was reading, without being silenced by the soothing or the lashes of the royal attendants.'—Syropul, pp. 265, 266.

use his influence with the princes of the West to procure them.' This convention having been officially ratified, the Emperor announced the consent of his prelates to the doctrinal accommodation, and on the 6th of June, 1439, it was announced that the divisions of so many centuries were at length closed for ever. The Confession of Union was recited in Greek and Latin, and it was hailed by the acclamations of both parties, who embraced with seeming warmth, and interchanged the salutation of peace.¹ The ceremony was most imposing; the triumph of the Pope appeared complete.

Gibbon adds, however (so true is it that a haughty spirit goeth before a fall, and as man gains the pinnacle of his ungodly ambition the glory of it vanishes away), 'the same year, and almost the same day, were marked by the deposition of Eugenius at Basle,' and another Pope elected in his place. On the other side, the Emperor and the Greek ecclesiastics were far from meeting with a warm welcome home. Some twinges of conscience had doubtless been felt by them that they had not acted uprightly in what they had done, but they were little prepared for the storm of indignation that awaited them when they were received more as traitors of their Church. The subscribing prelates dreaded the popular anger more than anything they hoped to gain from either the Pope or Emperor; and, 'instead of justifying their conduct, they deplored their weakness, professed their contrition, and cast themselves on the mercy of God, and their brethren. To the reproachful question, What had been the result or use of their Italian Synod? they answered with sighs and tears, Alas! we have made a new faith; we have exchanged piety for impiety; we have betrayed the immaculate Sacrifice; and we have become Azynites.'² Alas, we have been seduced by distress, by fraud, and by the hopes and fears of a transitory life.'³ They were shunned as contaminated persons;

¹ Waddington, *Ch. Hist.*, ch. xxvi.

² The Azynites were those who celebrated the Communion with unleavened bread.

³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. lxvii.

and the churches where they ministered were deserted, so that a virtual excommunication was passed upon them.

When the Patriarch Joseph died in Italy, two or three of the prelates had the courage—perhaps they had some fear of the reception they would have on their return—to refuse the vacant office. The Emperor with the clergy made choice, however, of Metrophanes of Cyzicus, who espoused the cause of the Union. The cross-bearers resigned their offices, and hardly a single worshipper would be found at St. Sophia. And Metrophanes, thinking to put down the tumult with a high hand, thundered out anathemas on all sides, and conferred orders on more obsequious men. But this course only made matters worse. Marc of Ephesus was hailed as ‘the champion of his country,’ and the sufferings of the Holy Confessor were repaid with a tribute of admiration and applause. Demetrius also was at the head of the Greek orthodox party, and maintained their cause in opposition to his brother.

Beyond the limits of the temporal sovereignty of the head of the Greek Church, an undisguised rebellion and resentment broke out. Isidore, the Russian Primate, now made a Roman Cardinal, was roughly treated by his people. They were scandalised by what had been done, and by his endeavour to convert them to the Latin Church; and, calling a synod of Bishops, they condemned and imprisoned him. The crafty Bessarion thought it wiser to escape the tempest, and returned to enjoy his honours, and peace in the West. The three Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, called together a very large Council; they disowned what their representatives had done at Florence; condemned alike the concessions, and the Council; they pronounced sentence of deposition on all those whom the new Patriarch of Constantinople had ordained, and added the threat of excommunication, if it were not carried out; and even went so far as to threaten the Emperor, should he continue to defend the Patriarch and support the interests of the Latin Church.

This was in A.D. 1443. It had been the policy of the

Emperor hitherto, notwithstanding the terrible opposition and reproach which he encountered, to continue a seeming friendship with the Western Church ; for not only had some assistance been given him against the Turks, but the Sultan much dreaded to take any aggressive steps against Constantinople whilst this friendship lasted. It might have been thought that his subjects also would have seen the advantage of such a powerful alliance with the Western princes, and have moderated their animosity against the Latin Church, when their dreaded foes the Turks were hovering about in the outlying provinces. But, no : their original rancour seemed to increase. And when the synodical decision of the three Patriarchs, mentioned above, arrived, it was received with reverential respect, and only strengthened the clergy and people in the course they had taken. Then it was that the resolution of the Emperor became shaken. His continued attempt to resist the national feeling, and to alter the national faith, might have even endangered his life and crown more than his formidable foes, who ever seemed to be lying in wait for him. Still he endeavoured to pursue the most difficult policy of not breaking wholly with either the Latin Church or with his subjects near at hand.

The papal party were most anxious to secure him ; and a special effort was made, notwithstanding the distracted state of Europe, to make a powerful assault on the Ottoman forces. A diversion from the bitter religious feeling prevalent in Constantinople was for awhile caused by the Emperor calling upon his people to guard the Bosphorus, and make an attack upon the Turkish foes near at hand, whilst the Hungarian legions, with the renowned Huniades at their head, attacked them in the European provinces. A martial spirit for a time took possession of the people ; and the exploit of Huniades and his forces caused great enthusiasm. The Hungarian forces were led as far as the capital of Bulgaria, and two signal victories were obtained through the skill and ardour of their general. The successful result of the campaign was seen in the

proposal by the Turks of a truce for ten years. This was accordingly agreed on, since the object of the crusade had been obtained—the restoration of Servia, the ransom of the Christian prisoners, and the evacuation of Hungarian territory; and the one party swore on the Gospels and the other on the Koran, to abide by the terms of the treaty, appealing to the God of heaven and earth to witness what they had done, and to avenge the violation of it by either of them.

The papal legate, Cardinal Cæsarini, who has figured on former occasions, was present, but did not open his mouth, shewing that he disapproved of what was done. Hearing, moreover, that the Greek Emperor had been successful in his undertaking, and that the allies, not knowing of the treaty, were anxiously expecting the Hungarians to join them in crushing the Turks at so favourable a crisis, the legate called upon the Hungarian chiefs to repudiate their oath, and keep no terms with the infidel. ‘Is it thus,’ he exclaimed, ‘that you will desert their expectations (alluding to the Greek Emperor and his allies) and your own fortune? It is to them, to your God, and your fellow Christians that you have pledged your faith: and that prior obligation annihilates a rash and sacrilegious oath to the enemies of Christ. His vicar on earth is the Roman Pontiff, without whose sanction you can neither promise nor perform. In his name I absolve your perjury and sanctify your arms; follow my footsteps in the paths of glory and salvation, and if still ye have scruples, devolve upon my head the punishment and the sin.’ ‘This mischievous casuistry was seconded,’ says Gibbon, ‘by his respectable character, and the levity of popular assemblies; war was resolved on the same spot where peace had been so lately sworn; and, in the execution of the treaty, the Turks were assaulted by the Christians, to whom with some reason they might apply the epithet of infidel.’¹ Many of the French and German volunteers withdrew, however; the Poles disliked to serve again, and even the

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. lxvii.

Hungarians were divided, and seemed to lose their zeal in the cause ; at the instigation, however, of their youthful sovereign Ladislaus they marched forward to overwhelm the Turks.

Space will not permit me to enter into any of the thrilling details, but suffice it to say that, roused by the treachery of the Christians, untrue to their word, the Turks called to their aid their co-religionists from Asia, who with rapid marches came to help them, and together they rushed forward to meet their foes with a resistless force, so that the Hungarians suffered a signal defeat ; their King was killed, and ten thousand Christians—among whom was the Cardinal Julian—were left dead on the field of Varna. This was a fatal blow to the Christian cause ; a few years pass over, in which the Turks gained one portion of territory after another ; and in the meantime many changes take place. Another Pope is on the chair of St. Peter, who loses patience with the Greek Church, and would leave it to its fate because its people will not submit to his supremacy. The Sultan Amurath has left his youthful son to succeed him, and gone into religious retirement. The Emperor John Palæologus is dead. Great dissensions arise in Constantinople about his successor ; but at last Constantine, the eldest of the remaining sons of Manuel, is established on the throne. He is the last of the Cæsars ; and singularly enough bears the same name as the first Christian Roman Emperor, who established his throne at Constantinople.¹ To him Pope Nicholas V. in 1451 addressed, as some think, a prophetic menace, when, after complaining that the Greeks had trifled too long with the patience of God and man in deferring reconciliation with the Church, he announced that according to the parable in the Gospel, three more years would be granted to them like the fig-tree, to prove whether they would become fruitful ; and if the Greeks still remained obstinate, then

¹ It is with the death of this Constantine that the celebrated historian Gibbon virtually closes his famous work on the *Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire*.

the tree would be cut down, and they should not exist as a nation.

And now the sad and exciting story of the siege and capture of Constantinople must be told in as few words as possible. The new Sultan by whom it was taken was of a most savage and licentious nature. Torrents of blood were shed on the slightest provocation; and when he gained full regal authority he at once put his younger brothers to death, that there might be no possibility of their ever raising up dissension or rebellion against him. He was moreover crafty, ambitious, and able. To the foreign ambassadors he was courteous when they came to congratulate him on his accession, and spake fair; and he inspired the Greek Emperor with hopes of peace and friendship by his solemn oath and assurances. But he had not forgotten the treachery of the Christians and the little regard they paid to their oath with him, while his father was yet alive and able to come to his aid; and therefore he dissembled, and bided his opportunity. His heart was set upon the capture of Constantinople, the fair, the strong, and beautiful city, which he determined within himself to possess at all hazards, for it was the key of the situation to keep Eastern Europe at his feet.

He quietly increased the strength of his forces, and maintained a severe discipline without taking any offensive action. The first appearance of a rupture seemed to come from the annoyance which the Greeks gave him. Several of their ambassadors were very persistent in claiming some annual payment, and seeking for more than had been stipulated. This importunity became so vexatious that the Vizier, who did not want to injure the Christians, gave them a salutary warning of what they might expect did they continue their foolish threats; but heeding him not, they appealed to the Sultan, who sent them a soft and courteous answer, that he would redress their grievances when he returned to Adrianople. He had no sooner come, however, than he ordered all payments to cease for the future, and the Greek officers to be driven away

from their posts. The next order was still more aggressive, and was, in fact, the beginning of the siege of Constantinople.

There is a narrow pass in the Bosphorus about five miles from the famous city ; on the Asiatic side a strong fortress had been built by the grandfather of the Sultan. Mahomet II. now announced that in the spring he would have a thousand masons at work, each having two men under him, to build a fortified castle on the European side. Many means were used to divert him from his purpose. Remonstrance and pleading were alike in vain. Treachery was in his heart ; and he was beginning to lift the mask when he said :—‘ I form no enterprise against the city ; but the Empire of Constantinople is measured by her walls. Have you forgot the distress to which my father was reduced when you formed a league with the Hungarians ; when they invaded our country by land, and the Hellespont was occupied by the French galleys ? Amurath was compelled to force the passage of the Bosphorus ; and your strength was not equal to your malevolence. I was then a child at Adrianople ; the Moslems trembled ; and for awhile the gabours insulted our disgrace. But when my father triumphed in the field of Varna, he vowed to erect a fort on the western shore, and that vow it is my duty to accomplish.’ The meaning of this message was understood. Constantine regarded it as a declaration of war, and was resolved to prepare for a terrible conflict. He was for a short time left in peace ; his advisers encouraged false hopes, that by patience means would be found by the Western powers to prevent the Sultan taking the step he had designed.

But spring came and the fortress was begun. It ‘was built in a triangular form ; each angle was flanked by a strong massive tower ; one on the declivity of the hill, two along the sea-shore ; a thickness of twenty-two feet was assigned for the walls, thirty for the towers.’ Constantine was thoroughly alarmed as he beheld its strength and progress ; yet he endeavoured still to keep on terms of peace

with the Sultan, as he had not sufficient power to resist him. He sent the most piteous entreaties for succour to the Western powers ; but they treated them with indifference, and seemed as if they cared not for the downfall of the city by the Turks. Pope Nicholas also stood aloof till it was too late.

A noble and courageous spirit was awakened, nevertheless, in the breast of Constantine ; and he endeavoured to rouse up his people to make a resolute defence. Constantinople was larger than any four cities of Europe, and in its reduced condition could still number more than a hundred thousand inhabitants ; but after a searching inquiry was made, the Emperor was told that there were not more than ‘four thousand nine hundred and seventy Romans’¹ capable of taking part in the defence. But what still further weakened the small resources of the Emperor were the bitter dissensions among his people, and the intense hatred they exhibited towards the Latins, which was probably one reason which made the latter so slack in coming to aid them in their dire necessity. A year or two before the siege took place, the Greek ecclesiastics had sent letters of encouragement in the name of the whole Church to the Bohemian heretics, as they were termed by the Western Church : praising them for their conduct ; for their rejection of the innovations of the papal Court, and their adhesion to the true faith ; and finally they called upon them to conclude a treaty of union with them ; ‘not such union as that mockery of concord dressed up at Florence, from which truth was far removed, but Union, founded on the respectable opinion of the ancient Fathers !’ Such conduct could only provoke the Western princes who alone could help them.

Constantine was in the meantime endeavouring to gain help by becoming reconciled to the Roman Church, and had both received the papal Legate with great deference, and attended the public service together with him at

¹ They still considered themselves the representatives of the ancient Roman empire, and their emperor as the true descendant of the Cæsars.

St. Sophia, where the name of the Pope was mentioned in the liturgy in connection with their own Patriarch. This caused great offence, and the people openly insulted the Legate ; and moved by the words of a bigoted monk, Gennadius, a cry rang from one end of the city to the other, 'What need have we of succour, or union, or of the Latins ? Anathema to those who join them.' And henceforth they were regarded as infidels and heretics by the Greeks. This conduct was fatal to them ; the Emperor was deprived of the affections and warm support of his subjects ; and their deep hatred against the union of the Churches, which they knew only meant subjection to the papal See, led them to offend those through whom the Emperor looked to obtain help in the coming conflict. Whether, then, we regard the behaviour of the Greeks at this juncture as holy enthusiasm for their religion, or as a grievous infatuation, it is clear that they had resolved to risk all, even the destruction of their beautiful city, rather than give up their faith, and submit to papal authority.

The winter had passed, the spring in its beauty had fairly set in, and the verdure of new life was beginning to spread itself over the face of nature, when the first open rupture between the Greeks and Turks began. The rapacious Moslems frequently made forages into the Greek territories ; and Constantine therefore applied for a Turkish guard to protect the fields and harvest of his subjects. The guard was fixed ; but their first order was to allow free pasture to the mules and horses of the camp, and to defend their brethren if they should be molested by the natives.

A little later on a conflict arose between some Ottoman soldiers who had left their horses in the ripe corn fields of a village near, and the owners, and the consequence was that several of both nations were slain ; but the Sultan took matters with a high hand, and sent a detachment to exterminate all in the village ; many fled, but some forty were killed. Upon this the gates of Constantinople were closed, and all intercourse between the two people came to

an end. Some Turkish captives were released, and Constantine sent this message to Mahomet: 'Since neither oaths, nor treaty, nor submission can secure peace, pursue your impious warfare. My trust is in God alone: if it should please Him to mollify your heart, I shall rejoice in the happy change; if He delivers the City into your hands, I submit without a murmur to His holy will. But until the Judge of the earth shall pronounce between us, it is my duty to live and die in the defence of my people.' Thus did this last of the Roman Emperors resolve to meet his fate. His only hope was in God, and as a true Christian soldier he prepared for the worst.

Another winter passed and spring came round again, but in the meantime both sides had been busy preparing for the assault. The use of the cannon had been but lately discovered, and Mahomet had been deeply interested in casting one of enormous size, with which he hoped to blow down the walls of the city. Constantine had been chiefly occupied in looking to a more thorough defence. But at last the banners of the Turks were seen approaching the walls of the city in battle array.

'Of the triangle which composes the figure of Constantinople,' says Gibbon, 'the two sides along the sea were made inaccessible to an enemy; the Propontis by nature, and the harbour by art. Between the two waters, the basis of the triangle, the land-side was protected by a double wall, and a deep ditch of the depth of a hundred feet. Against the line of fortification, which Phranza, an eye-witness, prolongs to the measure of six miles, the Ottomans directed their principal attack; and the Emperor, after distributing the service and command of the most perilous stations, undertook the defence of the external wall. In the first days of the siege the Greek soldiers descended into the ditch, or sallied into the field; but they soon discovered that, in proportion to their numbers, one Christian was of more value than twenty Turks; and after these bold preludes they were prudently content to maintain the rampart with their missile weapons. Nor should

this prudence be accused of pusillanimity. The nation was indeed pusillanimous and base, but the last Constantine deserves the name of a hero ; his noble band of volunteers was inspired with Roman virtue ; and the foreign auxiliaries supported the honour of Western chivalry. The incessant volleys of lances and arrows were accompanied with the smoke, the sound, and the fire of their musketry and cannon. Their small arms discharged at the same time either five or even ten balls of lead, of the size of a walnut ; and, according to the closeness of the ranks and the force of the powder, several breastplates and bodies were transpierced by the same shot. But the Turkish approaches were soon sunk in trenches, or covered with ruins. Each day added to the science of the Christians ; but their inadequate stock of gunpowder was wasted in the operations of each day. Their ordnance was not powerful, either in size or number ; and if they possessed some heavy cannon, they feared to plant them on the walls lest the aged structure should be shaken and overthrown by the explosion.'¹

Along the whole line of defence the Turks had planted fourteen batteries ; but in addition to this array of artillery the enormous cannon, which had been prepared during the winter, with two others of almost equal magnitude, were now directed against the walls of the city.² Great things were expected from them. Some idea of the magnitude of this giant piece of ordnance may be obtained when we are told that the bore measured twelve palms, and the weight of the stone bullet shot from it was six hundred pounds. It took a frame or carriage of thirty waggons, with a team of sixty oxen, to drag it from its foundry at Adrianople to Constantinople ; and nearly two months to get it the distance of a hundred and fifty miles. It could not be reloaded and fired more than seven times a day ; and even then it became so heated that it burst and killed several of the

¹ See the passage in Latin from Leonardus Chiensis ; *The Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire*, ch. lxxviii.

² *Ibid.*

soldiers. This threw the Sultan into a terrible rage ; but a means was found of cooling the ordnance ; and by persevering efforts the walls of the city began to show signs of breaches. The Turks then pushed forward to the sides of the ditch, and attempted to form a passage over it by filling it up. All available materials were thrown into the wide chasm.

The capture of the city seemed imminent ; but the besieged were not yet at their wit's end, or at the end of their indomitable pluck, which a holy zeal had awakened. They had many a long and bloody conflict, and constantly cleared the ditch, chiefly by night, and so foiled the besiegers. Another device for taking the city was to undermine the walls, but it was difficult on account of the rocky nature of the ground, and the Christians in this were equally successful in frustrating their operations. A still further scheme was set in motion to compass their overthrow. A prodigious wooden turret was built, moved by rollers, and covered with several folds of raw hides ; loopholes were made, and it was so contrived that, while the lower part was filled with ammunition, a staircase was made for admitting the soldiers to the upper platform, where there was a scaling-ladder, which could by the contrivance of pulleys be raised, and spanning the wide ditch, be planted on the walls of the city. At last, by one means or another, the tower of St. Romanus was partly demolished and a breach was made, through which the Turks rushed in ; by a desperate effort on the part of the besieged, however, they were driven back, and, darkness coming on, they deferred any further attack till the morning. 'At the dawn of day the impatient Sultan perceived with astonishment and grief that his wooden turret had been reduced to ashes, the ditch was cleared and restored, and the tower of St. Romanus was again strong and entire. He deplored the failure of his design, and uttered a profane exclamation, that the word of thirty-seven thousand prophets should not have compelled him

to believe that such a work, in so short a time, could have been accomplished by the infidels.'

As yet no succour had arrived from the Christian princes; they seemed to stand aloof and leave the Greeks to their fate. At last five large ships bore in sight, to the great joy of the besieged. And yet these mainly bore the supplies of ammunition and necessary food which Constantine had taken care to contract for before the siege began. One vessel had the imperial flag flying at its masthead. But it was no easy matter to gain the harbour in the face of a formidable array of antagonists. The spectacle became intensely exciting. 'The five Christian ships continued to advance with joyful shouts, and a full press both of sails and oars against a hostile fleet of three hundred vessels; and the rampart, and the camp, the coasts of Europe and Asia, were lined with innumerable spectators, who anxiously awaited the event of this momentous succour. At the first view that event could not but appear doubtful; the superiority of the Moslems was beyond all measure or account, and in a calm their numbers and valour must inevitably have prevailed. But their hasty and imperfect navy had been created, not by the genius of the people, but by the will of the Sultan. . . . In the Christian squadron, five stout and lofty ships were guided by skilful pilots, and manned with the veterans of Italy and Greece, long practised in the arts and perils of the sea.' More than once they had nearly been overpowered, but again and again they repulsed their enemies, and scattering their vessels on either side they bore proudly forward till they arrived securely within the harbour. Many thousands of the Turks had perished, but to no purpose, and the Sultan was now beside himself with rage, and began to meditate a retreat. The hopes of the Christians revived, both at the success with which their defence of the city had hitherto been crowned, and the timely succour which they had got. It was sufficiently manifest that if the Western princes had sent them any reasonable amount of support the city might never have been lost; and the last relics of the Roman

name might have been saved, and a Christian fortress maintained in the heart of the Ottoman empire.

There was a pause in the assault. It was doubtful what would be done. The reduction of the city seemed to be hopeless, unless some means of attacking it by sea could be found. After much perplexity, the Sultan at last resolved to make another supreme effort to overcome the city by a double attack. With immense labour he had his vessels transported to the upper harbour ; he then built an enormous bridge or pier on rafters, on which he planted one of his enormous cannons. And whilst firing from this, his galleys with troops and scaling-ladders approached the more accessible portions of the wall. The Christians beheld these preparations with consternation. Their already weakened and reduced forces must now be divided to resist the assault in many places. They were not idle as some have accused them, for they resolutely opposed the works in their progress, and nightly attempted to burn the vessels and frustrate the devices of their enemies. But the soldiers of the Sultan were more vigilant and stoutly guarded their operations, and at last all was completed, and another assault was fixed upon. The night before, the Emperor summoned to his palace his chief men and the bravest of his allies, and bid them to prepare for the defence. ‘The last speech of Constantine,’ says Gibbon, to whose account we are greatly indebted, ‘was the funeral oration of the Roman Empire ; he promised, he conjured, he vainly attempted to infuse a hope, which was extinguished in his own mind.’ The scene, as told by one present, was most touching ; each felt that the end was come ; they wept and embraced, and with a resolve to die, if needed, ‘each commander departed to his station, and maintained all night a vigilant and anxious watch on the rampart. The Emperor and some companions entered the dome of St. Sophia, which in a few hours was to be converted into a mosque, and devoutly received with tears and prayers the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. He reposed some moments in the palace, which resounded

with tears and lamentations; solicited the pardon of all whom he might have injured, and mounted on horseback to visit the guards, and explore the motions of the enemy.'¹

The Turks had been vigorously employed all through the night. But their operations had been carried on with the strictest silence. 'The troops, the cannon, and the fascines were advanced to the edge of the ditch, which in many parts presented a smooth and level passage to the breach; and his fourscore galleys almost touched with their prows and their scaling-ladders the less defensible walls of the harbour. As soon as the light of day appeared, the assault began both by sea and land. The Sultan threw his whole available force into the attack on both sides, and made horrible and cruel sacrifices of his men, and a terrible conflict of blood and smoke, of din of arms and confusion ensued, which it is impossible to picture. The strength and ammunition of the Christians began to fail; but the real cause of Constantinople being eventually taken was through the faint-heartedness of one of the chiefs of the allies. When Justiniani, the Genoese, was wounded and saw his blood flowing, and felt great pain, his courage failed him, and he withdrew from his post in search of a surgeon. The Emperor tried to rally him:—'Your wound is slight; the danger is pressing; your presence is necessary, and whither will you retire?' 'I will retire,' said the craven soldier, 'by the road which God has opened to the Turks,' and at these words he hastily passed through one of the breaches of the inner wall, and, sad to relate, his example was followed by the greater part of the Latin auxiliaries. The Ottoman forces were some fifty, probably a hundred, times superior in number to the Christian, and seeing this terrible defection, they redoubled their ardour, and a large portion of the city now succumbed to the enemy. The Emperor had taken a conspicuous part in the battle, and as he saw the savage foes pouring

¹ See the passage in Latin from Leonardus Chiensis; *The Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire*, ch. lxviii.

in on every side he was heard in lamentable accents exclaiming, 'Cannot a Christian be found to cut off my head?' fearing to fall alive into the hands of the Turks. It is not known exactly how he fell; probably in gallantly defending a remaining portion of the city, or protecting his subjects from the ravages of the enemy; but his body was found under a heap of the slain. When he was no more seen resistance ceased, and the victorious Turks, after a siege of fifty-three days, became possessors of the city, which they have retained to this day.

There is little need to pursue the sad story much further, or to recount the horrible details of the sacking of the city. In addition to the slain and those who escaped, about sixty thousand Greeks were sold or taken as slaves; the beautiful Cathedral of St. Sophia was turned into a Mosque. Mahomet II. established his residence and his throne for himself and his successors on the same formidable position chosen by Constantine the Great. After some months his policy led him to grant the remnant of the Greeks their liberty and the free use of their religion, but subject to his control. Upon this numbers returned to the city, very many of the churches were allotted to them, a new Patriarch was chosen, but he had to receive the crosier or pastoral staff from the hands of the Sultan.

And what effect had the fall of Constantinople upon the rest of Europe? The Latins had seen their rival struggling with heroic zeal against a common enemy, and came not to the rescue, but remained as if unconcerned spectators. Now that she was grovelling in the dust and shorn of all her glory, when they could no longer help her, they awoke as from a dream to the consciousness of their own peril. The fall of Constantinople was the most serious blow to their own safety. If they had not been so infatuated by their blindness they would have perceived that, in helping the Greeks to withstand the Turks, they were also providing a barrier of defence for themselves. Their own base and intolerant pride and selfishness brought upon themselves also a dire calamity, a peril

which made the Western princes and prelates tremble for fear of what might be coming upon them. The flood-gates had been opened, and a mighty stream of the wild Saracens might be expected to pour forth and ravage, as another scourge of God, the Western countries. Hallam says, 'A sentiment of consternation, perhaps of self-reproach, thrilled to the heart of Christendom. There seemed no longer anything to divert the Ottoman armies from Hungary, and if Hungary should be subdued, it was evident that both Italy and the German empire were exposed to invasion.'¹ Milman says, 'On no two European minds did this disaster work with more profound or absorbing terror than on Pope Nicholas V. and Æneas Sylvius.'² The degrading humiliation of the Christians in the East, the sad waste of life, the sore distress and misery to which they have been subject for many generations, lie to a great extent at the door of the Western powers to their eternal shame, and may be traced up, among other things, to that insatiable and antichristian ambition of the papacy, which sows the seeds of discord, disunion, and bitter animosity where it cannot reign supreme.

The year after the fall of Constantinople, war was proclaimed against the Turks at the Diet of Frankfort; but few of the princes came forward, and the Emperor of Germany, Frederick III., is especially named as of a narrow and cowardly spirit, which brought him into great contempt. The Ottoman forces, however, were not long before they were on the move again to make fresh conquests in Europe; and had it not been for Huniades and Scanderbeg, who stand out as heroes at this time,³ they would have swept over many of the Western provinces with irresistible force. Instead of waiting for the Turks Huniades went forward into the heart of Bulgaria, and encountered for three days the whole force of the Ottoman army, four times more numerous

¹ *Europe During the Middle Ages*, i. chap. vi. p. 496.

Latin Christianity, book xiii. ch. xvii.

³ Sir William Temple, in the interesting essay on *Heroic Virtue*, ranks both of them among the seven chiefs who have deserved the title of heroes without wearing a royal crown. — *Works*, v. 385.

than his own. 'But the last and most glorious action of his life was the defence of Belgrade against the powers of Mahomet the Second in person. After a siege of forty days the enemy's forces, which had already entered the town, were compelled to retreat; and the joyful nations lauded Huniades and Belgrade as the bulwarks of Christianity. About a month after this great deliverance, the Champion expired; and his most splendid epitaph,' says Gibbon, 'is the regret of the Ottoman prince, who sighed that he would no longer hope for revenge against the single antagonist who had triumphed over his arms.'

Scanderbeg, the son of Castriot, the hereditary prince of Epirus, had been left as a hostage in the hands of the Turks, and brought up from early years as a Mussulman; but when he came to man's estate he abjured the Mahometan faith, and raised a revolt in his native country, and among the Albanians against the Turkish forces. Fabulous tales are told of his exploits. The Sultan entered the country, at the head of sixty thousand horse and forty thousand janizaries, and after only taking the small fortress of Sfetigrade, had to retire with shame and loss from the walls of Croya, the castle and residence of the Castriots. No less than three thousand Turks are said to have been slain by the single hand of Scanderbeg. Speaking of the reverses of the Ottoman army at this time Hallam says:— 'Mahomet II. had been kept at bay by the Hungarians; he had been repulsed with some ignominy by the Knights of St. John from the island of Rhodes. A petty chieftain defied this mighty conqueror for twenty years in the mountains of Epirus; and the persevering courage of his desultory warfare with such trifling resources, and so little prospect of ultimate success, may justify the exaggerated admiration with which his contemporaries honoured the name of Scanderbeg.'¹ It is no disparagement to his fame that, after so famous a career, he was obliged at last to fly, for his resources were exhausted; and he died a fugitive in a foreign country.

¹ *Europe During the Middle Ages*, i. ch. vi. p. 498.

Æneas Sylvius, when raised to the popedom as Pius the Second, devoted the remainder of his life to repulsing the Turks. He roused at the Council of Mantua a spark of enthusiasm against them ; ‘ but when the Pontiff appeared at Ancona to embark in person with the troops, engagements vanished in excuses ; a precise day was adjourned to an indefinite term ; and his effective army consisted of some German pilgrims, whom he was obliged to disband with indulgences and alms.’¹ When a more likely expedition was afterwards directed against the Turks, and they seemed on the point of gaining success, the Pope who succeeded Pius II. withdrew the forces under the plea of exterminating the Bohemian heretics.

And thus things stood in Europe on the death of Thomas à Kempis. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the venerable Canon of Mount St. Agnes was informed of all that passed both in the attempted reunion of the Churches, and the siege and fall of Constantinople. Two of his near neighbours, as already stated, Priors of the monasteries of the Brothers, attended the Council of Constance ; many of the Flemish people had taken part in the Crusades, and those who were fortunate enough to return home would readily detail the tidings of what had transpired, and eagerly seek for further information of subsequent events. The news of the fall of Constantinople, and what led to it, ran like wildfire throughout the whole of Europe. The whole Continent was panic-stricken, for an apprehension of danger and of a further overthrow of Christianity seized upon the vast majority. Taking these things into consideration it is not unlikely that à Kempis became well acquainted with what had been passing in the outer world. And though living in seclusion with the Brethren of Common Life, yet was he led, as we have already seen, to take an interest in the general welfare of his fellow-creatures, and especially in those things that concerned the welfare of Christ’s kingdom : and so the tidings of these more momentous events that happened, doubtless deeply

¹ Gibbon, *Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire*, chap. lxxviii.

impressed him. He could see God's hand in the terrible judgments ; he could feel that God still reigned supreme, though confusion and wickedness had multiplied on every side ; and that He had some great purpose in view, though clouds and darkness were round about Him, and about His ways with the children of men.

There is another subject, which can only just be touched upon in closing this already long chapter, and that is respecting the origin of the Bohemian Brethren, or, as they are sometimes called, *the Moravian Brethren*, since they arose some thirty years before the death of à Kempis and had acquired some standing. They sprung from the better portion of the Hussites, and were, like the Brothers of Common Life, distinguished by their withdrawing from the tumultuous commotions of the times, establishing themselves in settlements, and promoting in their midst a rule of peaceful godliness. They seem to some extent to have followed the example of the Brothers of Common Life, who already had some of their institutions established in the country ; and yet they differed from them in this essential point, that they kept their societies independent of the existing government of the Church. They did not oppose it, further than to guard their communities from the reigning vices and corruptions of the times, neither did they wish to be as separatists from the Church, yet they refused to subject themselves to the control of those in authority, or to be dependent upon them for their existence. And it is to this isolation of themselves from the rule of the Church that their continuance to the present time may be attributed, while the Brothers of Common Life, though carrying on a reformation in religion, were through their being subject to the Church gradually swept away, and came to nought during the troubles of the great Reformation.

Since this time it is well known that the Moravian Brethren have extended their settlements into many European nations. In this country they were received in the eighteenth century with cordiality by the Bishops, and regarded by them as brethren ; and, though having separate

communities, they neither in spirit nor intention became schismatics. Indeed at the Moravian Synod, held in 1749, the venerable Bishop Wilson, of Sodor and Man, was elected one of their Antecessors ;¹ and it is said that the good old man accepted the office with thankfulness and pleasure.² They were not altogether free from error previous to the Reformation, but are reputed to have rejected the Sacrifice of the Mass, Purgatory, Transubstantiation, Prayers for the Dead, the Adoration of Images, and the Supremacy of the Pope.³

I must now return to the further account of what happened at Mount St. Agnes during the remaining days of Thomas à Kempis.

¹ Hook's *Eccl. Biog. on Zinzendorf*, vol. viii. p. 844

² Hatton's *Memoirs of Bishop Wilson*, p. 246.

³ Waddington's *Church Hist.*, chap. xxv.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Events, 1467-1471—Records of the Brothers who died—À Kempis in his old age—Infirmities trouble him—He prepares to leave the world—A soliloquy on heaven—The last recorded notices by à Kempis in the ‘Chronicles of St. Agnes’—His death, A.D. 1471—The account of him in the Chronicles by another hand—Remarks on his appearance, and on the pictures of him—The characteristics of his inner life—Notices respecting the others’ writings of à Kempis not already mentioned—Pirkhamer’s commendation of his works.

DURING the few last years of Thomas’s life we have the following particulars recorded by him in the Chronicles of his House:—

‘In the year 1467, on the night of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, after *Te Deum*, a devote laic and “oblatus,” Nicolas Bodiken, a faithful servant of Christ, and a special “laudator” of the Virgin Mary, died. A few days before his death he suffered great oppression in the head, and was afflicted with severe pains in other parts of the body, but came joyfully and with full resignation to his happy and much desired end. He lived a long time with us, but on account of the necessities of his mother and grandmother, it behoved him with the consent of the Prior to take charge of them, and therefore he went forth to them. After they died, however, he returned to our monastery. And then having completed thirty years, he slept in the Lord, having a good testimony from all in the House.

‘In the same year on All Saints’ Day, after “compline,” Arnold Gerard of Warendorp, our miller, a faithful laic and fellow commoner (*commensalis*), died. He was much beloved, and very obliging to all the lay community, and the Brethren. He lived with us fourteen years, and died in the thirty-third year of his life.’

The only item recorded in the Chronicles for the year 1468 is the death of Godefrid Hyselham, a native of Campen, a laic and 'donatus,' aged eighty-three. He had formerly been the miller of the monastery, and is recorded to have been faithful, and modest in his behaviour. Afterwards he was appointed to be the porter, and was known for his kindness and compassion to the poor. At length being greatly enfeebled by age he died in peace, by the mercy of God, and was buried in the cemetery of the laics.

There is only a single entry also in the following year which runs thus:—'In the year 1469, Brother Gerard, otherwise called Cortbeen, priest, and a native of Herderwic, died within the octave of the Nativity of our Lord, on the day of St. Thomas of Canterbury, Bishop, in the afternoon before vespers. He lived with us almost ten years in the religious order, piously and devoutly. He undertook much toil both in harvest time and in the winter—cutting down wood in the marsh, because he was a strong man and well skilled in ordinary and difficult work, yet he did not relinquish internal and Divine affairs. At length he was visited by the Lord with dropsy in the legs, and after he had endured his infirmities a while, he "migrated" from the world to the Lord in the forty-second year of his age. After the funeral solemnities of the mass and watching, he was buried in the east passage.'¹

Thomas à Kempis had now entered upon his ninetieth year. He had thus become very old and venerable; though not so vigorous or active as formerly, and showing unmistakably the feebleness of old age, he had hitherto been in good health it would seem, and still continued to fulfil a few duties as he was able. He was somewhat shrunk in body, and his face had rather a worn appearance, but his eyesight was still good. He was much beloved and revered by all around him, and by all who came to visit the monastery: and not a few came because of the saintly man, now so celebrated in the Brotherhood who had so long maintained the life and discipline of 'the New Devotion,'

¹ *Chron. Can. Reg. Mt. St. Agnes*, T. à Kemp., ch. xxix.

and the return to primitive Christianity among them. His very presence seemed to create a sacred atmosphere ; all who dwelt in or around the monastery felt that there was a holy influence existing, that pervaded the place ; and those who came to visit the House seemed to breathe this atmosphere ; it was felt not only in the sacred services, but in the refectory as well as in the Chapel, and the other places, in the tone of the conversation, and the various labours they engaged in.

Thomas himself had not only spent a very useful and holy life among the Brethren, but upon the whole, it had been a peculiarly happy life. I have before adverted to the humane and affectionate nature of Thomas's disposition, notwithstanding his love of retirement, and seasons of enjoined silence : and it was a constant delight to him to be surrounded by so many loving Brothers, who were, like him, striving to follow their Lord, in all true godliness. Instead of one natural brother, he found a multitude, who loved him better and more purely than brothers often do. The affection which relatives often exhibit towards their own kindred is not unfrequently insincere ; it is very often grounded on self-interest ; and it is only on this account they shew kindness to their kindred ; but as to these spiritual Brethren that Thomas had around him, they had given up the world with its vanities and riches, and were far from desiring or longing for aught that another possessed, for they were all poor, and had taken the vow of poverty, so that it was not for worldly wealth or some temporal advantage that they sought him, but from pure love, and for furthering the salvation of their souls. Here then was congenial society for Thomas at such times of refreshment from labours and devotion as were needed ; intercourse with cultivated minds, with earnest awakened souls, all striving to be true servants of Christ—following in His blessed steps, walking in the same narrow way that leadeth to Everlasting Life. The strict discipline that was maintained among them would not lessen the enjoyment he had in the fellowship of such Brethren, but rather enhance it ;

for did it not strengthen the bond of holy affection? was not the interest and affection he had for them, and they for him, the more unselfish and real? And well-pleasing and agreeable to the mind of Thomas must it have been to have witnessed and be allied to this well-ordered Brotherhood, and that the zeal and labour of faithful men for the promotion of a godly life among them had not been in vain. On looking back what a blessed company of faithful men he had intimately known through the many years he had lived, who had gone before him; whom he could look forward to meeting again amid the society of the firstborn in heaven. He had of late years recorded in the *Chronicles* the deaths of several advanced in years, who had been fellow-pilgrims with him, pressing forward to the high mark of their heavenly calling in Christ Jesus: and as first one and then another were called away, he must have longed for his departure to the home above, and have felt that his time would shortly come, when he must put off this flesh, and enter into the presence chamber of his adorable Saviour: and we cannot doubt but that he was living in continual readiness for his joyful summons.

Moreover about this time symptoms of disease began to shew themselves, and he who had been so hale and well hitherto grew infirm. Few particulars are recorded concerning the closing scenes, or the latter portion of the life of Thomas à Kempis. One matter, however, is especially mentioned, which is that towards the end of his earthly career he was afflicted with dropsy, from which he eventually died.¹ Another writer states that he had tumours on his legs,² which is inferred probably from its being known that he died of the above complaint. Be this as it might, it is evident, from the nature of his illness, that he would not be able to move about much, and that he must have been eventually confined to the limits of his cell. Probably as long as he could he attended the services of the Sanc-

¹ See the record of his death in the *Chronicles of Mt. St. Agnes*, by another hand, which will shortly be given.

² Mooren, *Nachrichten über T. à Kemp.*, p. 140.

tuary. To do this, however, some effort would be required, and most likely for a time he would use crutches ; and when no longer able to mount the steps to the choir, would make his way, perhaps with the kind help of a loving Brother, to the chancel door, like Brother Alardus, whose death he had noted in the Chronicles of the House some years before, and there listen with devout attention, but with the solemn feeling that very soon the sweet melody of prayer and praise would be heard by him no longer in the flesh.

We must not imagine, however, that this would depress him ; death had no terror to him, as it has to many others ; he was waiting for it ; like the labourer who had come to the end of his day's toil, he was feeling weary, and wanted to be at rest ; there was nothing to keep him back now, and he had many loved friends in the other world that would welcome him ; nay, the prospect of the coming change would oftener kindle in his breast a brighter hope, that the time of his deliverance was at hand, that as a captive he would be set free from the bondage of this corruptible flesh, and that he would ere long be permitted to join the heavenly choir, and, with saints and angels above, sing the new song of everlasting praise unto Him Who hath redeemed us with His most precious Blood. His standing at the door of the chancel without would be to him a fit symbol of his own case, while waiting before the gate of the heavenly paradise, which he trusted would soon be opened to receive him. Often during his past life had his thoughts gone forward to the time when he should 'migrate'—this was a phrase he was fond of using—from this world to the Lord, and entering the presence chamber of the Lord of all lords, would behold the King in his beauty, and the land that was far off : and now the hour of his departure was drawing nigh ; his days were numbered ; he was within sight of the goal, and the hope of the heavenly prize was before him ; with St. Paul, then, he could say, with more confidence than he had ever formerly done—for had he not now come to the close of life ?—' I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the

faith ; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day.'

It might be that now, when he felt the burden of his flesh and its infirmities increasing upon him, his thoughts did not flow freely, his mind moved slowly, and he could not raise his affections upwards always so readily as he had formerly done ; and in this sort of necessity we must not suppose that Thomas was above using helps, to sustain and keep consciously alive within him the love of Jesus and the grace of His Holy Spirit, for he seems to have provided against such times of trial. The little books in a quiet corner from which he is known to have derived in his old age so much peaceful rest and spiritual sustenance, would now be doubly precious to him in helping him to lift his thoughts heavenward. He did not want learned and subtle treatises in theology with which to entertain his soul ; but something wherewith he might call to remembrance the grand and fundamental truths of his holy religion, and such sentiments of piety and devout aspiration as would serve to revive his drooping heart. And what words more suitable could he have for such a time as this, than some of his own touching words in the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' respecting the Day of Eternity, which was shortly to dawn upon him ? Here are one or two deserving particular notice :—

O most blessed mansion of the city which is above ! O most bright day of Eternity, which knows no night, but is ever enlightened by Sovereign Truth !

O day ever joyful, ever secure, and never changing into a contrary state !

O that this day would shine upon us, and that all these temporal things would come to an end !

To the saints it shineth, glowing with everlasting brightness ; but to those that are pilgrims on the earth it is only seen afar off, and as it were through a glass.

The citizens of heaven know how joyful that day is ; but the banished children of Eve bewail the bitterness and tediousness of this.

The days of this life are short and evil, full of sorrow and straitnesses.

When shall I enjoy true liberty without any hindrances, without any trouble of mind or body?

When shall I have a solid peace, peace secure and undisturbed, peace within and peace without, peace every way assured?

O good Jesu, when shall I stand to behold Thee? When shall I contemplate the glory of Thy kingdom? When wilt Thou be all and in all to me?

O when shall I be with Thee in Thy kingdom, which Thou hast prepared for Thy beloved from all Eternity? ¹

There is another collection, however, of devout passages, of exquisite fervour, in another of his works, which would be especially appropriate for him now whilst anticipating the time when he would be admitted into the society of the Blessed. In some prefatory remarks to this book, from which we have already taken several extracts, and in which he had treasured up some of his choicest thoughts for his future use, as well as for the benefit of others, he likens it to a pleasant garden wherein he may at any time enter, and find such thoughts as would be suitable for him, in the time of divers necessities, when he might wish to refresh his soul and have it lifted up to heavenly things, during any season when his heart was overcome with weariness or burdened with sorrow. And now that he was entering the dark valley and shadow of coming death, he would find prepared words that would be especially helpful to him, and cheer him with the glorious prospect of what lay beyond; for they were designed to call to his remembrance the heavenly country to which he was hastening. As they too are his own words and familiar to him, they are given complete as being very beautiful and well fitted for him at such a time as this, whilst preparing to meet his latter end. After the text, 'Lord, I have loved the beauty of thy House; and the place of the habitation of thy Glory,' ² with which he heads these devout aspirations, he thus begins:—

¹ Lib. iii. cap. xlvi. 1, 2, 3.

² Ps. xxvi. 8.

1. How willingly I would be with Thee, O my God, Thou knowest full well ; and how vehemently I long for it I cannot sufficiently declare.

I do not desire this only when I am in trouble ; but even when it is ever so well with me, I long the more to be with Thee.

But how shall my longing be satisfied? It wearieth me to be here, and yet I must ; I would fain be with Thee, but it is not yet allowed me. I see nothing for it but that I bear patiently this delay, and resign my desire to Thee.

For what? shall I repine when thus it must be? This be far from me.

Forasmuch as many saints have contentedly continued in this world, whose hearts were in heaven.

But if Thou wilt to prolong my pilgrimage here, I will obey, however long it pleaseth Thee.

Nevertheless that my desire of being with Thee may be more pleasant during its expectation, I would meditate a little with myself on the heavenly mansion.

Yet I presume not to penetrate into the least of those joys which Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee. But there is a little here and there on which I will meditate, that my affections, often weighed down and infected by worldly things, may be again excited, and lifted up again by the hope of Eternal Life.

2. Oh, if that day had but dawned on which the joys of heaven had ravished me ! How joyful then should I be, and how happy should I think myself ! How blessed should I then be in settled peace !

Then would there be no more searching out anything, when no secrets would lie hid.

But my life is passed in the night, so that it is no wonder my eye is blinded amidst the clouds of glory.

Yet will I lift up mine eyes, look from afar, and salute that holy city Jerusalem, which is built in the Heavens of living stones, i.e. of angels and sanctified men, who are ever full of praise and joyful song, praising God without end.

Ah my soul ! take courage now and having put on the wings of thy desires mount upwards, flee from bodily senses, transplant thyself from the visible figures of the world to the holy habitation of God ;

To the new Jerusalem, established in perpetual peace, crowned with glory and honour, and perfected with the abundance of all good things.

3. Behold they are wonderful and ineffable, of which it is not possible for man to speak.

The sense cannot grasp, neither can the human intellect comprehend, how glorious God is in His saints, how wonderful He is in His Majesty.

Stretch forth thy thoughts even to the highest point ; enlarge thy desires into the perpetual Eternities ; and say with the Prophet, 'Glorious things are spoken of thee, holy city of God.' ¹

There whatsoever is desired is had, and whatsoever is had is securely possessed.

There God is seen face to face, clearly and without enigma, not by snatches or for a short space, but in full light without end.

There the blessed and glorious Trinity is recognized, and the inseparable Unity, which is adored, praised, and blessed by all the citizens of Heaven.

There too is the only Beloved, the Elect of all, more precious than all riches, the desirable treasure, my LORD JESUS CHRIST, the immortal Bridegroom of the Church ; in Whom are hidden from the world, but revealed unto the saints, all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Oh ! how joyful are all the saints before the face of the Saint of saints, Who is the cause and origin of their salvation.

For there He speaks not to them in proverbs, but sheweth them openly of the Father.

He Himself is their Book, the Word from the beginning with God, teaching them concerning all things ; and accomplishing all things, so that no glory can be wanting to them.

Oh ! happy Everlasting glory, which springs not from brief memory, but from the real presence of God in the splendours of the saints.

4. There is also the most glorious mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, adorning the whole heavenly court with her appearance and beauty, whom troops of virgins surround and attend, as the flowers of roses and the lilies of the valley.

There are the Angels and Archangels, arrayed in their orders, sedulously intent upon the Divine praises ; of whom some are in the highest orders, some in the middle, some in the lower, divided according to their Hierarchies.

There are Patriarchs and Prophets, who being full of the Holy Ghost, sang beforehand of the coming of Christ, who now recognize the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as King of kings and Lord of lords, and praise Him with unceasing blessings.

¹ Ps. lxxvii. 2.

Now they see eye to eye their Redeemer, Whom they long waited for ; and Whose coming they desired with all their heart.

There are the illustrious and most venerated preachers of Christ, the Apostles and Disciples of the Lord, who were full of holiness and grace, founders of the Catholic Faith ; but now devout intercessors in Eternal glory for those whom they begat and instructed in the faith.

5. There conspicuously shines the venerable Baptist of Christ, John, the especial friend of the Bridegroom.

There Peter, the heavenly key-bearer ; Paul, the illustrious doctor ; Andrew, Philip, Thomas, James, and John, with the rest of the Apostles and Evangelists, the pillars of the Churches.

To hold their faith, and to imitate their example, is the way to Everlasting Life.

There are the noble Martyrs, empurpled in their own blood, blessed for ever with Christ ; for though their bodies were most cruelly torn, yet could not their souls be separated by torments from Christ.

There are the most celebrated Confessors, who despising a worldly life, were found worthy to obtain the heavenly.

There are the great and glorious Doctors, who, by the service of a holy life, arrived at a more than ordinary degree in the contemplation of God ; many of whom have left in their writings a living image of sanctity.

There also are the young men and virgins, old men and children, assiduously praising the name of the Lord together ; ascribing to the Divine Majesty whatever they did that was good and virtuous ;

Ever thankful, ever devout, ever happy, and ever inflamed ; never oppressed by weariness, but ever uplifted by the perpetual contemplation of God.

O, how glorious is this Kingdom, wherein all the Saints do reign with Christ, clothed in their first robe, and secure of that which is to follow !

There they now follow the Lamb, whithersoever He goeth ; forasmuch as there will be no separation from Him, for they shall rejoice in the Lord, and rejoice throughout Eternity.

6. Contemplate these things, my soul ; and lift up thy thoughts above all visible things.

Truly this is a holy place, and the Lord is in it ; here peace and gladness for ever abound ; here is abundance of all good things, and a perpetual absence of all that is evil.

Oh ! that thou wert able to seize ¹ but a little somewhat of the ineffable joys of the saints, so that thereby thy pilgrimage might be in some degree comforted ; because in me, i.e. my flesh, thou wilt find only labour and pain, the storms of temptation and the sorrow of the world.

Oh ! that the Author of supernal light would condescend to breathe somewhat thereof into thee, my soul ; and not send thee back empty to thy dry fare.

But that, according to the riches of His superabundant grace, He would purify and cleanse thee from all material forms, and lead thee, even for a moment, into the abyss of His Eternal brightness.

Would to God thou couldst bring back from that heavenly sanctuary the form and exemplar of true holiness, which thou shouldst imitate !

For better and truer are the examples of heavenly things, which are established, than those which are proved by earthly demonstrations.

Grant to me, O Lord God, to taste and to understand what is the perfect felicity of the saints, not through the books they have written, but by the Holy Spirit, Who teacheth concerning heavenly things above that which the human sense can attain unto.

Grant to me also to uplift my life much more fervently to more spiritual objects, and amidst the constant burden of tribulations to hold valiantly the palm of patience ; until, when the debt of the flesh is paid, I may at length through Thy mercy arrive at that blessedness for which I so much long.²

Animated by a noble and enduring faith, as his life had been, à Kempis held on firmly to the end. The other world to which he was fast approaching was to him most real and most glorious, peopled with the best and holiest of beings, and where he should behold his beloved Saviour face to face, and hear His voice. He could look above and beyond the dark valley, and with a joyful hope of shortly entering into the blessedness of the Saints in light Thomas would thus wait his appointed time till his change came.

Though now contending with both the infirmities of old age and sickness, he does not appear to have been wholly laid aside, for we have some evidence that he continued to do what he could to the last, or at least till within a few

¹ 'Rapere.'

² *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xxi.

months of his death. We still find him keeping up the Chronicle of the House as hitherto ; for in the year 1470 we have two entries made ; one was respecting the investment of two clerics and one 'donatus,' which took place 'on the third day after the feast of Servatius, Bishop, for the sake of avoiding a tumult of men, and a concourse of secular friends.' This is probably noted because it marked a departure from the usual course of such proceedings. The investments had customarily been made on a feast-day, and it is evident that a great concourse of people had congregated together on such occasions, and had most likely disturbed the solemnity of the service ; hence it took place on an ordinary day, so as to secure more quiet and true spiritual devotion, which the Brethren were most anxious to obtain. One of these clerics who was invested with the Order of Canons Regular was Otto Graes of Deventer, aged twenty-two : he had two brothers who had entered the religious order, and were priests, one at Windesheim and the other at Zwolle. The other that was invested was Rodolph Gerard of Amersford. The third, a novice and 'conversus,' was Henry Kalkar, thirty-seven years old, who lived with us, says *à Kempis*, before his investiture and dwelt among our laics : he was a good gardener. At one time he was in the kitchen, and at another time he was employed in waiting upon the sick. At length, after a season of probation, he was invested as a 'conversus.'

The other record in this year is the death of Brother Peter Herbolt, Deacon, on the day following that of the Martyrs Maurice and his companions,¹ after Matins had

¹ St. Maurice and his Companions, (Sept 22) A.D. 286. The famous story of the Theban legion deserves to be had for ever in remembrance. St. Maurice was the first commanding officer of this renowned legion, which was composed entirely of Christians from Upper Egypt. And when they refused to offer sacrifice to the heathen gods, Maximian ordered them to be decimated ; and they drew lots who should die ; and after every tenth man had been martyred, upon their again refusing, another decimation was ordered, and they were threatened that not a man should escape if they refused to obey. They forwarded a remonstrance, to the effect that though they were soldiers of the Emperor, they were first the servants of God, and could not renounce Him and that they would rather die than do this. The legion consisted of 6,600

begun, aged seventy-five. He was little in body, and by nature greatly debilitated : hence he was unable to keep the rules of the Order in many particulars : yet he often received discipline for his faults ; he washed the heads of the Brethren when they were shaven, and frequently read for others in the refectory. At length, having completed forty-three years in the habit of the Order, he came to his end. He was contrite, made his confession, received the Communion, was anointed, and fell asleep in the Lord with a good conscience and in faith. Several of the Brethren with our Prior George were present, praying for him ; whilst the rest of the Brethren remained in the choir to sing Matins and lauds. In the afternoon, after vigils for the dead had been sung for him, and other kind acts performed, he was buried in the east passage, by the side of Brother Gerard Cortbeen, Priest.

The last entry Thomas à Kempis made in the Chronicles of the House was in the same year in which he died ; it is as follows :—

‘ In the year 1471, on the Feast of St. Anthony the Confessor ¹ (January 17), there died, early in the morning after high mass, a devout laic, John Gerlac, a native of Dese, near Zwolle, nearly seventy-two years old. He had lived with us for more than fifty-two years in great humility, simplicity, and patience, enduring much toil and penury.

men, and the Emperor was so exasperated that he ordered them to be surrounded and cut to pieces. Animated by a noble and enduring faith they made no resistance, but patiently submitted to the slaughter ; and, mutually encouraging one another, it is said that not one of their number failed in courage.

¹ This saint was born in Egypt, near Heracleopolis, of noble and wealthy parents, A.D. 251. When about eighteen they died, and shortly after being persuaded that God had called him to a religious life, having provided for a sister, he sold all his paternal estates, and gave the proceeds to the poor. Afterwards he retired into the wilderness and led a very ascetic life. He was exposed to more than ordinary internal temptations from Satan, with which he struggled long, and eventually by prayer, watching, and fasting overcame them, supernatural help being given him. After a retreat of nearly twenty years, many flocked to him for advice and consolation ; many also came to live near him, and hence many monasteries were raised on the mountain-side, and the desert became a city of monks, living under strict rule. He was not learned, but a lover of the Holy Scriptures, and strove vigorously to follow Christ in a holy life.

And among other virtues which he possessed he was pre-eminent chiefly for that of taciturnity, so that through a whole day he would say very little : also in his labours, and while performing other duties, he was an example of silence. A little before his death he was seized with apoplexy, and was for some time delirious ; and was buried among the other laics in our cemetery.'

These are the last words known to have been written by Thomas à Kempis ; for here the Chronicle ends, so far as it was written by Thomas. It is then taken up by another hand, which briefly narrates the death and burial of the venerable Canon.

It is pleasing to know that when at last he was compelled to keep his cell, and unable to wait upon himself, there were loving hearts and willing hands, that counted it a great privilege to minister to the aged saint. His eyesight never failed him, for, as one of his biographers says of him, he never used spectacles even when old ;¹ and it is presumed also that he retained his faculties, and powers of mind and speech, till very near the end. It will not then be difficult for us to picture him to ourselves, still gathering the Brothers around him, sometimes collectively and then separately, to give them words of holy counsel ; and begging them to assist him with their prayers ; and then, as the hour of his dissolution drew nigh, we can imagine their gathering together for the last time to join in the commendatory prayer, and other devotions like the *Sequence* used at the death-bed of his early friend Lubert, suitable for such a time.

We would fain learn more of the last moments of Thomas à Kempis, but the records supply us with scanty information, and with this we must content ourselves. From these, however, we learn that he died at the advanced age of ninety-one, on the feast of St. James the less, viz. the 26 July, 1471, at the close of a long summer's day, after *compline*, the last of the Canonical hours of prayer, had been said. He had been sixty-two years in the order of Canons Regular, and fifty-seven in the Priesthood. He

¹ Franc. Tolensis, sec. 9.

had from his first entrance into the Monastery endured great penury, temptations, and labours. He had written the entire Bible which they used in the Monastery, and many other books for the House, and for sale. Moreover, in confirmation of what has been already stated, it is said, he composed various treatises for young men in a plain and simple style, but excelling in advice and efficacy of work. Thus he died full of days and full of sanctity. God called him forth from his abode on Mount St. Agnes 'to the Mount of Eternity on which he had so often fixed his eyes, which he had so long panted after; and his blessed soul passed into the unfading mansions to enjoy its God for ever.'¹ He was afterwards interred within the cloisters at the east end by the side of Brother Peter Herbort. These particulars are gathered from the short memorial of Thomas à Kempis, inserted in the Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes, which shall here be given as it stands in the original, since it is of so much interest, and shews at what point his work was broken off, and the record of his own departure, as continued by another hand. The last entry of Thomas was, as we have said, in the year 1471. It is needful to mention this again, as it will be seen that the Brother who writes the account in the Chronicles does not state the year, but refers to the previous entry made by Thomas. The memorial of him is on page 137, and is as follows :—

' Illuc usque Thomas à Kempis reliqua ab alio continua sunt.

' Eodem anno in festo Sancti Jacobi minoris post Completorium, obiit prædilectus frater noster Thomas Hemerken de Kempis natus civitate Diœcesis Coloniensis anno ætatis suæ XCII. et investitionis suæ LXIII. anno autem sacerdotii LVIII. Hic in juvenili ætate fuit auditor Domini Florentii in Daventria, et ab eo directus est ad fratrem suum germanum tunc temporis Priorem Montis Sanctæ Agnetis anno ætatis suæ XX., a quo post sex annos probationis suæ investitus est. Et sustinuit ab exordio monasterii magnam penuriam, tentationes, et

¹ John Wesley's preface to *Following Christ*.

labores. Scripsit autem Bibliam nostram totaliter, et alios multos libros pro domo et pro pretio. Insuper composuit varios tractatulos ad ædificationem juvenum in plano et simplici stilo, sed prægrandes in sententia et operis efficacia. Fuit etiam multum amorusus in passione Domini, et nire consolativus tentatis et tribulatis. Tandem circa senium suum vexatus hydropisi in cruribus, obdormivit in Domino ; sepultus est in ambitu orientali ad latus fratris Petri Herbort.'

The short notice by the new chronicler before he begins his work of recording the chief events of the monastery is a sufficient warranty that what had been written before had been done by the hand of Thomas à Kempis. I may here, however, add, in passing, that the *Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes* are continued down to the year 1478, in a similar manner to that in which à Kempis had kept them. But since he is no longer concerned in the details recorded, they do not seem to have that interest in them, as when he was alive and noted them down. It is therefore considered unnecessary to give further quotations from the work.

The venerable and much-beloved saint, who had been so long revered throughout the several Congregations and Monasteries of the Brotherhood, and looked up to as a Father of the New Devotion, had now been taken away from them, and the glory and chief ornament of the House on Mount St. Agnes had departed. He was the last of a past generation who had kindled afresh in the breasts of very many the enthusiasm and fire of true religion, and had so held aloft the Lamp of Life, and diffused its blessed rays, that it became a saving guide to numerous souls, so that the moral aspect of the country far and wide had been greatly changed for the better, and been much benefited by its salutary influence. God had, at last, called His faithful and devout servant home to his rest. And those who had known him, would now know him no more : they would now no more see the form of the old man, nor any longer hear his voice. His death had left a blank among them which could not be filled up again, and it is not to

be doubted that there were many hearts made sad at the loss of him. Still they must have anticipated his death, as in the course of nature he could not continue much longer among them. He was like a shock of corn fully ripe, and they had the consolatory assurance that he had been gathered into the heavenly garner, and had joined the blessed company of the departed faithful.

The memory of him, however, was sweet and sacred to them. His head, surrounded by a few grey hairs, had been a crown of glory on account of his saintliness, and the remembrance of him was embalmed in the breasts of very many of the Brothers, not only those near at hand, but far off; for long afterwards it was considered a great privilege to have seen and heard the pious and aged Brother of Mount St. Agnes; of whom they loved to speak and recount many things to those about them, and especially to the younger generation springing up. Before his death his visage had become somewhat more elongated than formerly, by reason of his years; and though he in some measure still retained a degree of freshness in his complexion, which had a brown mellow tinge with it, as formerly, yet his skin had acquired rather a parched or glazed appearance. Though past ninety he had not become bent with age, nor had his sight become dim, for till almost the last he was used to hold himself erect, and to read his little books without help. And if any dependence can be placed upon the portrait taken of him in his old age, he had still the same thoughtful look as of one who gazed beyond the present into the unseen world, and who still preserved that calm inward recollectedness of spirit for which he was remarkable.

It has been considered doubtful by some persons whether we possess any true likeness of Thomas à Kempis at all, and whether those which depict him are not likely to be imaginary. It may therefore be desirable in this place to speak a little about several of the pictures which represent him. I have had my attention drawn to this matter by conversations with two or three individuals much

interested in all that concerns à Kempis, and have been led to give some attention to it. It has been said, that it is so long since that it is impossible to possess a correct likeness of him ; and in support of this, it is added, that among those that do exist there is such a diversity of countenances that they cannot all be true representations of the same individual, and therefore no certainty can be placed upon any one. This may be admitted to a certain extent. I have seen eight or nine different portraits of him, most of them differing one from the other, and some very widely, so that at one time I felt doubtful whether any of them could be depended upon : and yet there are two or three things which make it highly probable that in some of them we may have a true likeness of him.

Portrait painting was at that time beginning to flourish, and the likenesses of celebrated men were taken. There were in the beginning and middle of the fifteenth century many celebrated painters and sculptors in the Netherlands. So early as 1396 Antwerp possessed five painter-and-sculptor establishments. The two brothers, Hubert and John van Eyck, had already attained great renown ; and Hemmling, the great Flemish painter, was Thomas's contemporary.¹ Thomas, it is true, abode in his seclusion, but in middle life his name was held in great esteem throughout all the country, and it might be that some one or other of his great admirers would desire exceedingly to possess a likeness of Thomas. But even supposing none of the celebrated men of his day took his portrait, there were several skilful painters among the Brethren, and one or two fairly so at Mount St. Agnes. They may not have attained to any fame, but they evidently possessed some ability in the art, for, in the seventh chapter of the *Chronicles of the House*, Thomas, speaking of a fellow-townsmen in the monastery, Godefrid Kempis, who died, says, that besides illuminating many books, 'he also painted, and adorned the walls of the sacrarium of the church in a most beautiful manner with images of the Saints.' And it

¹ Ullmann, *Reformers before Ref.*, p. 133.

is not unlikely that one or another would endeavour to obtain a good likeness of one who was the chief ornament of their community, or that other Brethren at a distance might desire to possess a portrait of him. John of Cologne, the pious companion of Wessel whilst at Zwolle, is spoken of as having been, previous to his coming, 'a skilful painter : ' and as his friend was an enthusiastic admirer of Thomas, it is not unlikely that he took a portrait of the saintly man, in middle life.

It is not unreasonable to think then, that we have indeed a faithful likeness of Thomas in some one or two of those that have come down to us. 'It was due,' says Mooren, 'to the memory of such a man, that his comrades and contemporaries should have left a faithful likeness of his features for posterity. Such a likeness was taken either during his life or immediately after his death. About a hundred years after his death Franz von Tholen found one at the Abbey of St. Agnes. It was then much faded and discoloured. The well-known saying of Thomas was upon it, "In omnibus requiem quæsi et nunquam inveni nisi in een Hoëcker niet een Boecker."' The Sub-Prior of Mount St. Agnes was at that time engaged in writing a memoir of his immortal predecessor, together with a new edition of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' and the last Prior, Cuperinus, caused a new portrait of Thomas à Kempis to be executed, for which purpose, no doubt, the old copy was made use of.¹ This old portrait of Thomas was probably the one to which F. Tolensis, one of the old biographers of him, alludes, and of which mention has been already made, so that we here have two witnesses to the fact that there was one in the monastery of Mount St. Agnes before its dissolution. From this double evidence then it would appear that there is little doubt but that we possess an authentic likeness of Thomas à Kempis—one, if not more ; for from further particulars it is clear that long ago other likenesses of him were extant. We shall here mention a few of them, in addition to those already named.

¹ *Nachrichten*, pp. 182, 183.

In 1681 Henry Brewer published at Cologne a biography of Thomas à Kempis with an 'apologia' of him on the four books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' And in this work, a copy of which I possess, there is an engraving of Thomas in his cell, which is a copy of a picture in much repute in his day,¹ and Mooren thinks that this might have been taken during his life or soon after his death.² In this print, Thomas appears sitting, clothed in the habit of his Order; a long table covered with a cloth is by his side, upon which he rests his right arm, with his head upon his hand. In his left hand he holds a rosary. A book lies open before him on the table, and on it is written the favourite saying, which is seen in other pictures of him, 'In omnibus requiem,' &c. Three other books lie behind on the table in order, and are severally entitled 'Biblia,' 'Concordant,' and 'Breviarium.' Opposite to Thomas there hangs on the wall a picture of the crucified Saviour, with Mary His mother, St. John, and Mary Magdalene standing near the cross. Thomas is looking up at it, and is represented as addressing these words to the Saviour: 'Hunc solum scio' (1 Cor. ii. 2), using as it would appear St. Paul's words, 'for I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' Behind Thomas on a shelf against another wall there is a box labelled 'Varia MSS.,' and on it also are a biretta, a candlestick and candle, ready for use. A black hood edged with fur and his 'toga' or cloak hang on two pegs below the shelf. The door of his cell stands open, and through it you see the country with a river winding at the bottom, and a town in the distance, which doubtless is Zwolle.

Mooren mentions another portrait which he says is one of peculiar interest. It represents Thomas in a kneeling position, gazing up into heaven, where he beholds his blessed Saviour: and an angel appears holding out to the adoring supplicant an open book, whereon is written,

¹ *Biographia Thom. à Kemp.* p. 21. A copy of this print is given at the close of the second volume.

² *Nachrichten*, p. 182.

“Follow Me,” are the words of Christ.’ In the background is a town with the name of ‘Kempen’ written over it.¹ This is probably one of the three pictures painted for the town of Kempen, of which mention is made elsewhere. It is now, however, to be seen in one of the galleries at Cologne.

There is another engraving of à Kempis which is placed as the frontispiece to one or two editions of his works, which represents him as taken in middle life. It has also been selected by the indefatigable and critical scholar, Eusebius Amort, the great defender of the rights of à Kempis to the authorship of the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*,’ and appears as the frontispiece in his ‘*Plena ac Succinta Informatio*,’ on this question, published in 1725. There is a decidedly Flemish cast of countenance about it, with a broad expansive forehead, and rather a phlegmatic appearance, which makes him look heavy, but which eventually gives you the impression of one that had deep thoughtfulness and firmness of purpose. He holds in his hands an open book, and is clothed in the habit of his Order. He has, moreover, a rough hood or cape with a fringe thrown over his shoulders, and a biretta on his head. I can find no account of its history, or the source from which it was obtained, but it seems to have been one fixed upon by several as affording a good resemblance of him. For it may be well to note here, that the beautiful little engraving of à Kempis that appears in Dibdin’s ‘*Introduction to the De Imitatione Christi*’ seems to have been taken from this one. It is more highly executed and has a softer expression; it does not, moreover, convey such a heavy appearance in his countenance, but in giving a more ethereal cast to his features, there seems to be a frightened, timid look about him. These two portraits were submitted to an eminent artist, and it was his opinion that whilst there were certain differences between them, it was evident that the one in Dibdin’s book had been taken as a reverse from that which is found in Amort’s work. There seems,

¹ *Nachrichten*, p. 193.

then, to have been a predilection for this portrait, though, for some reason, it is not altogether satisfactory.

In the same book of Amort's another picture of à Kempis is given, which has been described in a previous chapter; where the pious Canon, robed in his priestly dress, is represented as kneeling before the altar in a state of ecstatic devotion.

I have before noticed the coloured engraving of à Kempis which I saw in the *auberge* at Agnietenberg. A copy of this has been placed as the frontispiece to the second volume of this work. And the value of it rests in these two things: first, that it is considered to be the most authentic likeness extant of à Kempis in his old age; and secondly, it gives the reader some idea of the nature of the locality where the venerable saint lived. It is very like the portrait of him in the priest's house in Zwolle. This, however, is very old, and in so imperfect a condition that it would not be satisfactory if reproduced by photography. And since we have the same face in the one from the *auberge*, where Thomas appears seated in the grounds attached to the monastery, it was deemed better to give this, in which we see him placed in the midst of his familiar haunts. Mr. Th. F. van Riemsdijk, in a letter to me, says, 'There is but little difference between that picture and the likeness of Thomas à Kempis which you saw in the pastor's house.' The likeness in both is probably taken from some original one, which was esteemed to be genuine. That this was so with regard to the one in the priest's house seems very probable, as Heribert Rosweidus informs us that in his time (1621) this picture—alluding to the one executed for the last Prior of Mount St. Agnes—was still preserved at Zwolle;¹ but where he does not say. Eusebius Amort also alludes to an effigy of Thomas, which was probably the same, as he states that it gave him an aged and grave appearance.²

There is a portrait of à Kempis also, which gives the same style of face as the one just alluded to above, but

¹ *Annot. ad Vitam*, s. 121.

² *Ded. Crit.*, s. 325.

before he had grown so very old. It represents him in the vigour of mature life, seated in his cell, with a few books around him as usual, and the scourge hung up on the wall, with which he was wont to chastise himself, as has been already stated, once a week ; and on a scroll there is a favourite sentence of his in Latin. There is a refined, intellectual appearance about the brow and nostrils which leaves the impression of a well-developed mind, and an expression of saintliness from which you would gather that he was one who had faithfully practised the Christian virtues, and lived according to the exalted tenour of his own pious instructions. It is the countenance of one who had gained the mastery over the flesh and lived above the world ; there is a firmness of purpose indicated, combined with a generous soul ; and while the features speak of one who deeply realized the unseen world and the things of God, they denote a loving, tender, sympathetic heart. The picture is greatly to be valued on account of its artistic excellency, and the probability of its being genuine. And I rejoice that through the help of a kind friend I secured this rare print, a copy of which is placed as the frontispiece to the first volume. It is deemed to be a genuine likeness from these two considerations : first, because it bears a resemblance to the best authenticated portrait of Thomas à Kempis ; at least it seems to be the face of the same man when younger, though even then beyond the prime of life ; secondly, from the words *ad vivum* attached to the inscription on the picture, which must mean a lively or life-like portraiture, or ‘after the living man,’ or ‘after the life.’ What authority there is for this is not known, but when placed on the print it was evidently designed to lead those who looked upon it to regard it as a true likeness of à Kempis ; and that there was some ground for this assertion, though we are ignorant of it, we may reasonably presume. The name of the artist is in the corner of the picture, though hardly discernible ; and he would scarcely like to risk his credit by such an assumption unless it had

been true, when at the time it was done the veracity of the statement might have been otherwise questioned.

The consideration as to whether we possess any genuine portraits of the reverend author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' is one of no little interest ; and it is a satisfaction to know that there were formerly pictures of him in existence, not long after his death, which have been well vouched for, and that there is some probability that in two or three instances there exist real likenesses of him on which we may fairly depend. The two last mentioned are such, as far as it is possible to give an opinion ; and they have been reproduced that the reader may form his own judgment of this saintly man. Good portraits enable us more vividly to bring before our minds the features of the outward man, as an index of what he really was, and serve to kindle a deeper interest in his life and writings. They not only help us to form some more definite conception of him, but we are unconsciously led to be more interested in reading of him, or in listening to what he says. To delineate the chief characteristics of the inner man—the most striking features of his character—is, however, a higher work, and requires no little discrimination. After what has been said, however, in former chapters, respecting à Kempis, very little more need be added, than briefly to give a glance at the whole, and to fill up here and there what has been but faintly traced out.

There is undoubtedly a family likeness in all God's true children ; we can trace certain resemblances in all those who belong to the same household of faith ; for they all seek to conform themselves to the same rule of holy living, and to follow the same pattern set them by Christ their Lord ; the same hopes, aims, and desires more or less pervade their breasts ; they have the same common enemies to fight against, they use the same weapons of holy warfare, they are marching forwards under the same banner, and alike look forwards to reaching heaven ; and so they imperceptibly grow into a likeness of one another ; but as in the human face, though there are certain features

common alike to all, yet is there an infinite variety, by which one can be distinguished from another ; so is it with Christians : for though they may be all known by certain marks as one people, and distinguished from other men, just as one race is from another, still in each one there are lineaments and combinations of features by which every one is individually known from the rest.

It is important to notice this point more fully, because in a former work I have made a remark to the effect that it would be difficult for the devout admirer of the '*De Imitatione Christi*' to bring himself to believe that the author of it could be one of the foremost persecutors of Huss and Jerome, who suffered martyrdom at the stake for their faith ; having in my mind Gerson, the Chancellor of Paris, who is by some brought forward as the author of the '*Imitatio* ;' and a reviewer taking up the question makes the following criticism upon it : ' Fuller acquaintance with such lives as those of St. Louis of France, and with such works as those of Thomas Aquinas, will surely convince Mr. Kettlewell that a very real fervid love of the Saviour of mankind might coexist with a sincere belief that the persecution of heretics was a duty.' And this brings me to the very point which needs some elucidation, and that is, that though love to the Saviour is a distinguishing mark in all Christians, yet it should be borne in mind that there are different sorts, as well as degrees of this love, which will manifest itself consequently in various ways, and makes one Christian to differ very much from others.

Both Mary and her sister Martha loved our Saviour very much, but there was a difference in their love, and Mary Magdalene's was still further different from the other two ; she had been a great sinner, but she loved much. The love of St. Peter and St. Paul was different from that of St. John's towards our Lord. It is sometimes difficult to say in what the difference consists ; but though both the former were most ardent and devoted in their love to Jesus, it was of another kind to that quiet yet deep love of his, who is especially designated as ' the disciple whom

Jesus loved.' Moreover it may differ in the same man, at one time of his life to another. This is seen in St. Peter. His love for Christ after his restoration was of a more perfect kind to what it was before ; and the love of God which St. Paul had before his conversion seemed quite another thing to what it afterwards became. Before Christ was revealed to him he thought he was displaying his zeal and love for God in being a persecutor of the Christians ; but when he came to know Christ better and to learn of Him, he himself became willing in his turn to suffer persecution for Christ's sake, and could no longer think of injuring others who differed from him, or who would not believe just as he believed. His remarkable words on this question shew the change that had been wrought in him. 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour ; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.'¹ 'Charity suffereth long and is kind . . . beareth all things, endureth all things.'² And this he had learned from the revelation of Christ to his soul, and by taking Him for his example. For in giving an account of the reason why he thus behaved, he says, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' Therefore do we find him exhorting his converts after this manner : 'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' And again, 'Be ye therefore *followers* of God as dear children ; and *walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us*, and hath given Himself an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.'³ And this marks the difference of his love at one time from another, and how it often makes one class of Christians to differ from another.

It is contended then, that one of the highest kinds of love is that which makes a person more like to the object of his love ; and so it is in the spiritual life ; the truer our love to Jesus and the more it is freed from other interests, the more it will make us like to Him in our way of living and acting towards others : and all love that comes short of this is imperfect. It is quite abhorrent to think

¹ Rom. xiii. 10.² 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 7.³ Eph. iv. 32 ; v. 1, 2.

that Christ could ever have become a persecutor ; and as St. Paul's love for Christ led him to become like Christ, so that the same mind became implanted in him, as there was in his Lord and Master, the very spirit of a persecutor had died within him.

And this was the character of the more perfect love to Jesus which à Kempis possessed. He had learned of Christ, having a desire, and making an endeavour, to become like his blessed Master. He was in very truth a follower, *an imitator of Christ*, and had imbibed a like spirit to His : and in an age when many who professed to be most ardent servants and lovers of God were persecutors, and thought they were doing God service by it, his love of Christ made him to dislike anything of the nature of persecution ; it was contrary and repulsive to his soul ; and thus his fervid love essentially differed from the fervid love of those who thirsted for the life of their fellow men, who, though acknowledging the same Saviour with themselves, chose in some matters to think otherwise than they did.

The truth is, that not only have some persons a weak and faint love towards Christ, while others have a strong and fervid love, but even with those who seem to have this strong, ardent love for our Lord, much depends upon how it is educated, trained, directed, and exercised ; and what other views, interests, and sentiments are combined with it, and affect it. Hence great zeal or apparent love for Christ may be displayed when all along there is much selfishness or pride, an undue attachment to one's own opinion of alone being right ; or the feelings may be enlisted in behalf of a religious party, sect, or society ; even for a doctrine, rule, or custom of the Church, and they may by this means become perverted and corrupted, so that a very contrary mind or disposition may be in them to that which was in Christ Jesus ; and events may so lead one or another on till they lose sight of the example of Christ, as other objects and pursuits engross their attention, and outgrow and overtop their love for Him.

There are those who can talk well for Christ, can labour

unremittingly in His service, contend and argue most resolutely on His behalf; and some few are even ready to die for Him, and yet have not grown into His likeness. It has not become a necessity of their love; they do not assimilate themselves to Him they love; His life does not really become theirs; they either neglect to cultivate it, or the spirit of the carnal man carries them away, till it makes them unlike Christ, though they do not seem to know this. That a very real and fervid love of Christ, after some sort, may exist in those who are persecutors, we do not care to question, since two disciples of our Lord wished to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans who would not receive Him; but the answer of Christ shews plainly that there was something very wrong and faulty in their love for Him; it was very imperfect, and needed to be corrected and wholly changed; for we are told, He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.'¹ There is indeed, in human nature, something natural according to the flesh to hate, punish, and even kill those who oppose, speak evil of, or do not support, but rather seek to injure, those we intensely love; but when, through the help of the Spirit, we rise to a higher life, and through the love we bear to Christ we become *imitators of Him*, we are led to put off the old man with his lusts, and to put on the new man which is after Christ Jesus, and can no longer entertain within us the spirit of persecutors, which would make us so unlike our blessed Lord, and be so contrary to what He desires us to be; whilst our constant endeavour would be to act, as well as think and speak, as He would, and as He would have us to do.

It is just such differences as these in the several characteristics of the spiritual life, that make the loveliness of sacred beauty to be so much more attractive in one Christian than in a multitude of others, though there may be a general resemblance in all; just as those finer touches

¹ St. Luke ix. 52-56.

which seem but pencil marks in the human face make one face to stand out as more lovely by far than ten thousand others. There is no need to dwell so long on the other characteristics of the inner life of à Kempis, as I have done on this of the Divine love in the human heart, which is the chief of all, but it should be observed here, in passing, that it is these delicate touches in the features of the soul, which bring à Kempis the nearer to resemble that likeness of the perfect man, Christ Jesus, that throw such a soft radiancy of light upon his character and make him so worthy of our admiration.

How powerfully this Divine love pervaded the heart of Thomas à Kempis, and mysteriously wrought in him, we may judge from what he says respecting it in several places. 'It is love that brings together the Holy God who dwells in heaven and the sinful creature on earth, uniting that which is most humble with that which is most exalted.'¹ 'It is the truth which makes man free, but the highest truth is love.'² 'God sheds forth His love into the heart of man, who thereby acquires liberty, peace, and ability, for all good things;' and, 'made partakers of this love, man reckons as worthless all that is less than God, loving God only, and loving himself no more, or if at all, only for God's sake.'³ I do not venture to quote what Thomas says upon the wonderful efficacy of this love of Christ in the 'De Imitatione Christi,' but, as the book is everywhere to be had, I must refer the reader to those chapters where, in a sort of sacred song, he pronounces her eulogy, viz. Book III. Chapters V. and VI. And then also see how he insists upon the way in which we should love Jesus above all things, in Book II. Chapters VII. and VIII. And after reading these it will be easy to understand, why Thomas should say that 'love is of itself sufficient;'⁴ and that 'in it he possesses all that he can ever want.' Hence in another place he says, 'Nothing is better for thee, nothing more salutary, nothing worthier and higher, nothing more perfect

¹ *Soliloq. Animæ*, x, 8.

³ *Concio*, xvii. ; *De Amore Jesu*,

² *Hortul. Rosar.*, xiii. 1.

⁴ *Soliloq. Animæ*, xviii. 3.

and blessed, than most ardently to love and most highly to praise God. This I say a hundred times, and a thousand times do I repeat, do it as long as thou livest and possessest feeling and thought. Do it by word and deed, by day and by night, at morning, noon, and eve, every hour and every moment.' ¹

Thus à Kempis lived in an atmosphere of Divine love. He continually breathed in it. He took it in by a constant recollection of it, by frequent stated meditation upon it, by repeatedly seeking the renewal of it, in devout prayer, and in the Holy Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. And he breathed it forth again in acts and accents of love towards God and man. His soul lived on this love; it gave life and strength and beauty to his whole being. In short, it was the dominant motive power within, the very key of his religious character, adding a brighter lustre and loveliness to his other virtues, beyond what they would have otherwise possessed. This led him to find a true delight in retirement and prayer; this drew him to a closer and sweeter acquaintance with his Saviour, to carry about with him a greater and more engaging consciousness of God's presence and favour, to live above the world while in it, to walk as one living in the unseen world, so as to actuate him in all he said and did. And so the love of God grew to be the inspiring source and sustaining influence of his daily life.

Another most noticeable characteristic of his life, which has been frequently alluded to, was his profound *humility*, such as is rarely seen in the present day: it was deep, unfeigned, and coming very near to the pattern Christ had set; for it led him, according to the prescript received among the Brothers, to try to live unknown to the world, to shrink from holding any post of honour, and to love to esteem others more highly than himself, seeing more good in them than in himself. But if we would learn more as to how it affected him, we must listen to his own words, which truly express his mind, when he says, 'Whoso

¹ *Vall. Lilior.*, xxvi. 1.

knoweth himself, is lowly in his own eyes, and delighteth not in the praise of men.' ¹ 'Good cause have we therefore to humble ourselves, and never to have any great conceit of ourselves ; since we are so frail and inconstant.' ² 'Without first humbling yourself, you will never ascend to heaven.' ³ And this humility was ever a great safeguard against becoming self-righteous on account of his attainments in grace. 'My son, it is more profitable for thee, and more safe, to conceal the grace of devotion ; not to lift thyself on high, nor to speak much thereof, nor to dwell much thereon ; but rather to despise thyself, and to fear lest the grace have been given to one unworthy of it.' ⁴

In combination with this was his remarkable *self-abnegation* and *self-detachment* from worldly things and carnal desires. A great many of Thomas's sayings pertain to this subject. Here are a few. 'The farther a man recedes from the consolations of earth, the nearer he draws to God ; and the lower he descends in himself, and the viler he becomes in his own sight, the higher does he rise towards God.' ⁵ 'Learn in all things to overcome thyself for the love of thy Creator, and then shalt thou be able to attain to Divine knowledge. How small soever any thing be, if it be inordinately loved and regarded, it keepeth thee back from the highest good, and defileth the soul.' ⁶ He represents Christ as saying to him, 'My son, forsake thyself, and thou shalt find Me. Have nothing of thine own, not even thy will, and thou shalt always be a gainer.' ⁷ 'I have often said unto thee, and now again I say the same, Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and though shalt enjoy much inward peace. Give all for all, seek nothing, ask back nothing, abide purely and with a firm confidence in Me, and thou shalt possess Me ; thou shalt be free in heart, and darkness shall not tread thee down. Let this be thy whole endeavour, let this be thy prayer, this thy desire ; that being stripped of all selfishness, thou mayest

¹ *De Imit. Chr.*, i. 2, s. I. ² *Ibid.*, I. xxxii. 6. ³ *Ser. ad Novit.*, ii. 8.

⁴ *De Imit. Chr.*, III. vii. I.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III. xlii. I.

⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 2.

⁷ *De Imit. Chr.*, III. xxxvii. I.

with entire simplicity follow Jesus only, and dying to thyself, mayest live eternally to Me.' ¹

A leading principle with Thomas, however, and from whence arose that peculiarly quiet force and beauty in his character as noticed in what has been said respecting Divine love, humility, and self-abnegation, was the doctrine of *the Imitation of Christ*, so interwoven with his life, as it is also, not merely in the book that bears that title, but generally in all his writings. Even in some of his small poems it forms the leading thought ; for two of his hymns begin with these words : '*Vitam Jesu Christi stude imitari.*' He speaks of Christ as the Master of all, the book, and the rule of the religious, the model of the clergy, the doctrine of the laity, the text and commentary of the decrees, the light of believers, the rejoicing of the righteous, the praise of angels, the end and consummation of all the longings of the saints.² He says, 'In Christ beam forth as in a pure mirror the consummation of all the virtues, and in no book or science can any thing better or more perfect be found or known than in this Book of Life, which is the true Light. But sweeter than incense is the perfume which the Passion of my Master exhales, comprehending in it a compendium of all graces.'³

In touching upon other points, it should be noticed that there was a *peculiar gentleness and tenderness of soul* about à Kempis, a thoughtfulness and care for others which made him apt to teach and ready to give counsel ; but as there was withal a deference and yielding to others, a readiness to give up his own way and views in things indifferent, it unfitted him for being a ruler or Prior, as his brother John was. He was *firm in regulating his conduct in life*, and *resolute in governing and directing his affections aright*, rising above the influence of outward circumstances, or rather making them the means of his advancement to a higher life. And yet withal he was *a little too credulous*, which led him too readily to accept many of the received

¹ *De Imit. Chr.*, III. xxxvii. 3.

² *Ser. ad Novit.*, i. 3, p. II.

³ *Concio*, xii. 'On the Four Methods of seeing Christ.'

views and customs of the age without considering whether they were entirely consistent with the Word of God, which he held as the infallible guide of life : and hence he was, as I have shewn, unlike Wessel, whose zeal for religion he had at first incited, who searched into these matters most thoroughly, and tested them by the light of truth.

Moreover, à Kempis had *the highest value of time*, regarded it as most precious property, and if lost irrecoverable. Hence he never indulged in idleness, which he accounted most dangerous and baneful, and the fountain of all evil ; and therefore he gave heed to the admonition of St. Jerome, who said, ‘Be ever engaged, so that whenever the devil calls, he may find you occupied.’

In summing up these characteristics of à Kempis’s religious life, I would conclude with the words of his biographer F. Tolensis, who, at the close of his account, says, ‘Those who have committed these few things to paper, testify of *his endurance* in joyfully bearing adversities ; of his *patience*, not only in equally tolerating the vices of men, but in kindly excusing them ; of his *sobriety, chastity, modesty, application, and earnestness* throughout his life ; of *his promoting the interests of the Brethren*, and of the common House ; of *his providing Divine exercises*, and such other things as would add more ornament and splendour to the decency and decorum of the sanctuary ; of his *assiduity in prayer, his burning zeal, and frequent profusion of tears.*’¹

And now to turn to another subject. I have already mentioned several of the works of à Kempis, which he wrote in addition to the ‘De Imitatione Christi,’ and several extracts have been given from them where it fell in with my purpose, in endeavouring to gain a further glimpse or insight into his life and character. There are a few other works, however, which have not been as yet particularly noticed, and seem to call for some remarks. But I would first observe, that occasionally doubts have been expressed about some of them, as to whether they have been written by

¹ *Vita Thom. à Kemp.*, sec. 12.

à Kempis, and whether they should not rather be attributed to others. It would be a long and weary work to follow these allegations, and contest the several instances in detail. Nor is there need. For while considering a few of the objections in passing, it may be sufficient to say generally, that there has never been any dispute as to his being the author of the great majority of the works attributed to him; and with respect to those which have been questioned we fall back upon the legal claim of his being in possession of the title to them, until satisfactory proof has been brought forward that they belong to some one else; and hitherto the claims of other persons have not been sustained, while those of Thomas seem sufficiently good and difficult to overthrow.

For, in support of his being the author of some of those about which there has been some question, there are two witnesses at hand which we may at any time examine: the first is the ancient Catalogue of his works, enumerated by name or title, written and published soon after his death, and before any other pretensions were set up; and that is the Catalogue given by his contemporary Biographer, to which allusion was made at the beginning of this work. The second witness is the first publication of his collected works in 1494 by George Pirkhamer at Nuremberg. And of this volume of the works of Thomas à Kempis there were a dozen editions printed before the year 1501. (Vide Malou's '*Recherches*,' p. 87.) And these witnesses, it is presumed, in the absence of any other substantial claims, will be sufficient to satisfy most reasonable men.¹

Sommalius's edition of the works of à Kempis is that which most modern compilers have taken as their authority for what he has written. And from the little information which he vouchsafes to give respecting the sources from whence he derives the several Treatises of à Kempis we may learn these particulars. On the title-page, he says,

¹ A third witness to some extent might be called forward, that is, the works which Thomas wrote out with his own hand, and are now in two volumes, in the Royal Library at Brussels.

the original author (à Kempis) had himself borne witness to having written many of them. On the first leaf, just before the dedication to the Abbot of St. Trudo, there is an index of the contents, with the remark, that those works prefixed with a star are edited from the original manuscripts ; the others only from old copies of the same, found in St. Peter's Library, at Ghent.

Sommalius then divides the works of Thomas à Kempis into three volumes. In the first he gives what may be termed the homiletical writings of à Kempis ; namely, his 'Sermons to Novices ;' of these there are three parts or series ; there is, moreover, another part to the Brethren (ad Fratres) : then follow his thirty-six 'Conciones et Meditationes' on the Life and Passion of Our Lord. In these all the chief points of the Gospel History are taken up in order, from the Incarnation of Christ to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the founding of the infant Church at Jerusalem. These 'Discourses and Meditations' were first published by Sommaliius, and do not appear in either of the volumes written by the hand of à Kempis. 'Future generations,' says Mooren, 'will thank Sommaliius for having saved and preserved this treasure for them ; for they will find much that is useful in them, both for their own edification and for the instruction of others.' I am not aware that they have ever been attributed to any but à Kempis. There is some question, however, as to whether he ever wrote the third part or series of the 'Sermons to the Novices.' The subjects are wholly different from the first two series, and relate more to the corruptions and superstitions of the Church before the Reformation era. But supposing those sermons in the third series were his, it is questionable whether he would have suffered them to have been published, had he been alive. Of all those treatises which are found re-written by his own hand, we may presume that he gave his sanction to being made public. But of the others there is reason to doubt whether he would have wished them to have gone forth at all, or not without some correction at least,

This is a matter, however, upon which nothing certain can now be said ; but it is well to bear this in mind, since it may apply to a few of à Kempis's writings, as it does occasionally to the writings of other men.

In the second volume *Sommalius* has the four books of the '*De Imitatione Christi* : ' the '*Soliloquium Animæ*.' Then come two of the most valued works of à Kempis which rank next after these, the '*Hortulus Rosarum*,' and the '*Vallis Liliorum*.' They do not appear among those treatises in the volume dated 1441, written by Thomas, but they do in the other. And they were probably composed at a later period to the other works, for the style is somewhat different, and has consequently led some persons to think that they were not written by the author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*.' There is greater connection of thought in the sentences ; moreover the passages are not so short and terse as many of his other writings, and take a more extended view of the work of Christ. Yet these points can hardly be taken as a proof that they are not the writings of Thomas, but rather that they were written under somewhat different circumstances, or at another period to what the others were. There is no doubt that in some of his works he made use of the teaching of his early instructors, and the notes that he retained of their discourses. This has been intimated all along. And this may serve to explain how the style of Thomas which appears in some of his former works was afterwards a little altered. Many a writer who looks at his early productions will readily acknowledge that his manner of writing has somewhat changed ; and this we may expect to find was the case with Thomas. But in addition to the evidence given by the ancient Catalogue, and the collected editions of his works, wherein these two books are enumerated, there is a peculiar internal testimony, which stamps them as the work of the author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' in that the sentences are made occasionally to rhyme, just as it has been pointed out in the above-mentioned book ; a peculiarity which may be said to belong

almost entirely to Thomas, and shews the care and method of his composition. The two books, viz. the 'Garden of Roses' and the 'Valley of Lilies,' moreover, apparently belong to one another, for the one seems to be like the continuation of the other: and the author might have made one book out of the eighteen chapters of the first, and the thirty-one chapters of the second, and given one or other title to the whole. It is quite unimportant that neither the first book treats of Roses nor the second of Lilies; though allusions are made to these flowers, for the author has the instruction of earnest-minded Christians in view. They are excellent treatises on religious ethics, with suitable meditations or soliloquies. When he wrote them he had evidently been made a Priest. And from what is said in the twelfth chapter of the 'Garden of Roses' it was evidently in the time of war, for he says, 'Seldom is good news heard; everywhere many battles rise up; within are fears, without are fightings. No day is there without labour, no hour free from the fear of death. Wars and fires arise, according to the just judgment of God, because of men's sins, that they may be urged on as with scourges to seek after heavenly things. Therefore unceasing prayer is above all necessary against all the dangers of the world; as a strong breast-plate against the darts of the enemy.' Most probably these words refer, says Mooren, to the devastations caused by the campaign of the Dukes of Burgundy and Gelderland against Utrecht, when the monasteries had much to suffer.

In this second volume also we have 'De Tribus Tabernaculis,' and 'De Disciplina Claustrialium;' the latter work refers to the regulations and duties of the cloister life among the Brethren, and has been by some reckoned a fifth book of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' Next to this comes 'De Fideli Dispensatore,' in which the duties of a faithful steward are set forth, under the character of Martha; who, whilst discharging her duties faithfully and in love to the Saviour, must learn not to despise the character of her sister Mary, whose service, though

more silent and hidden, is very acceptable before God. And he shews that both have their place in the Church of Christ, and must highly esteem each other. Some exception has been taken to its having been written by Thomas; 'the style is not like his:' it is said, 'it is not so natural, and resembles more the oily diction of the humanitarians. Also some pieces of advice are too worldly wise to have been given by Thomas.' And again it is said, 'The household which the steward mentioned in the book had to provide for, was a poor one, whereas St. Agnes, at the time of Thomas's being in office, was in a prosperous condition.' But surely these objections are not well founded. Thomas had not only passed through the straitened circumstances which the Brethren at St. Agnes had to pass through in early days, but, as we learn from the Chronicles of the House, though their condition was afterwards better, they had still seasons of sore trial, and never became rich in Thomas's days like those of other monasteries. Moreover, some of those with whom Thomas had been taught and brought up, had known something of the world and its ways, as his friend Kettle and Everard the priest of Almelo; and had learnt, in managing the affairs of the House, and in dispensing charities, certain cautions and safeguards that were necessary, so that though the steward should be harmless as a dove, he must be as wise as a serpent. Because Thomas recommends seclusion from the world, and the giving of the soul more entirely to God, it is wrong to imagine that he was wholly ignorant of what concerned outward duties. To suppose this, is a mistake. It was certainly not his bent to occupy himself with secular matters; he was more inwardly inclined, but his being once chosen as the Procurator of his House shews that he must have had some fitness for the office, and was in some measure qualified to give the advice he did: and the high and spiritual tone which he takes in teaching us how to sanctify and sweeten the common actions and necessities of daily life, is one worthy of Thomas.

In addition the second volume contains the '*Hospitale Pauperum*,' which does not, as the title would lead us to suppose, refer to Christian benevolence towards the suffering poor; but, like the '*De Disciplina Claustri*,' it speaks more of the conventual life among them, and how they are both inwardly and outwardly to embrace a life of poverty in the place where they dwell. Thomas often finds delight in recalling the teaching of Gerard Groot and Florentius, to whom the Brothers of Common Life owe their origin. In the nineteenth chapter of this work, a real treasure is to be found in the shape of brief ejaculatory prayers for the devout, which he terms versicles. The '*Dialogus Novitiorum*' explains the purpose and style of the work in its title. The old venerable Frieslander Priest who is brought forward in the fifth chapter was a favourite hero with Thomas.

In the introduction a young man having resolved to lead a religious life, inquires how he can more fully do the will of God, escape the temptations of the world, and at length attain eternal blessedness with the faithful in Christ Jesus; and the whole of the subsequent instructions are addressed to him, being as it would seem chiefly drawn from the memorable sayings and counsels of the early fathers of the Brotherhood. The '*Doctrinale seu Manuale Juvenum*' is of a similar character to the former book: but is more in the form of a short directory for leading a devout life. And it is to be noticed that Thomas begins by recommending a diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, to be followed by an attentive regard to the voice of conscience within us. The book '*Exercitia Spiritualia*' comes after this, and is followed by another of like title; both of which relate to those things which will promote the soul's welfare. '*De vera Compunctione Animæ*' bears more upon the early life of the convert, and how his contrition of heart is carried on with God in secret. Then follow two books, entitled '*De Solitudine et Silentio*,' in praise of the solitary life and of silence, which appear to have been written after he was relieved from the office of

Procurator, that he might the better apply himself to a life of contemplation.

In another part of the second volume, Sommalius introduces several of Thomas's minor works, among which 'De Elevatione Mentis ad acquirendum Summum Bonum,' may be considered one of his choicest pieces. In this part also we have some prayers by him, and some Hymns or Canticles.

In his third volume, Sommalius gives us the historical or *biographical* works of à Kempis, but without adding the Chronicles of Mount St. Agnes, of which he makes no mention, though the work is undoubtedly by Thomas, and has never been questioned.

The Lives written by Thomas are in three books, the first containing that of Gerard, the great; the second, that of Florentius, and the third that of nine of the earlier members and fathers of the Brothers of Common Life. As Henry Brune lived the longest of these persons whose memoirs are recorded, and died in the year 1439, it is thought probable that they were written after this time. To these there is added another biography, namely that of the sainted Dutch maid, Lidwine, which is dedicated to the Brethren, Canons Regular of the Monastery of St. Elizabeth, near Briel, Zeland, by one who calls himself Frater N., pauper et peregrinus. As this memoir does not find a place in the earlier editions of Thomas's work, it has been accounted spurious: and the letter N. seems to point to some other person rather than to Thomas. It is rather a lengthy memoir, and contains towards the close an account of three miracles; the last of which took place in the year 1448, from which it appears that it must have been written after this date. But, whether Thomas was the compiler of it or no, we learn from the prologue that the work had been sent to Brother N. for correction and criticism, and must therefore have been originally from another source.

At the end of the third volume we have some letters of Thomas, which have been preserved, and to which we have already largely drawn attention, written on various occa-

sions. To these succeed some more prayers on the Passion of our Lord. Then other prayers, chiefly addressed to the Virgin Mary and other Saints, concluding with a few more sacred Canticles. With regard to these Canticles, it may here be mentioned that in the Burgoyne Library at Brussels there is still to be seen a Codex written by Thomas, which was formerly the property of a Jesuit of Cortryck, which, besides other little works, contains some of the Hymns of Thomas, with music appended to them.¹

It is probable that all the works of Thomas à Kempis have not yet come to light. Mgr. Malou discovered in the Burgoyne Library at Brussels, whilst looking over the Codex, No. 4587, which is written in Thomas's own hand, a small but powerfully written work of his, consisting only of one page in the Low German or Dutch language. It had hitherto escaped notice, but possesses this inscription: 'Van Goeden woerden te horen ende die te spreken,' and the concluding subscription: 'Anno Domini M^o.CCCC^o. et LVI^o. (1456) Finitus et Scriptus per manus fratris Thomæ Kempis.'² This work is all the more valuable, as it is the only German work to be found that has been written by Thomas. And, singularly enough, there is a Latin copy of the work along with it. It therefore leaves the impression that there may be still some other of Thomas's works buried among the mouldy volumes of old libraries in the monasteries of Holland and Belgium.

The enthusiastic commendation of Prior Pirkhamer in his letter to Peter Danhauser, the publisher of the first edition of Thomas à Kempis's works in 1494, to encourage him in his project, will form a fitting conclusion to these few remarks; it especially applies to his best known writings. 'Nothing more holy,' he says, 'nothing more honourable, nothing more religious, lastly, nothing more for the Christian common-weal, can you ever do, than to take care that these books of Thomas à Kempis be made public; which, though hitherto not taken notice of, may, as fire hidden in the veins of a flint, be very useful and service-

¹ Mooren, *Nachrichten*, p. 176.

² *Recherches*, pp. 387-389, 3rd ed.

able to the Christian religion.' Then he tells us how some had with these writings put to flight the powers of darkness ; and, having given a character of the author upon his own knowledge of him, he addresses his friend again in these words : ' It will be well and considerably done by you, if you bring them out of dust and obscurity into light, that they may be generally read, since they either lead minds disposed and prepared to the search after their Eternal happiness, and to the contemplation of useful learning and solid wisdom, and this after an easy, swift, and compendious method ; or else they do fortify those who are already devout and spiritual, liberating them from the shameful ignorance and inexperience which is so extremely dangerous. And of how great edification these works are likely to be for all Christians, even to the greatest and most learned, it is impossible to speak or write. Therefore do not slight them, courteous Peter,' &c.

There are a few other interesting matters of a supplemental nature, which will be supplied in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER XXX.

Subsequent events. (1) Causes which led to the decline of the Brothers of Common Life—Compelled to take part in the Reformation movement, or submit to the Papacy—Their work became general and was not confined to the Brothers—The art of printing and the spread of education affected them—(2) The bones of à Kempis at Zwolle—The discovery of them at Mount St. Agnes—How they have been authenticated—(3) The tributes of respect paid to his memory—Some hope once of his being canonised—Pictures of him ordered at Kempen—The Gymnasium named after him—A small hospital founded—Centenary fête at Kempen in honour of à Kempis in 1880.

I CANNOT close these memorials without giving the reader some further information respecting two or three matters which should not be omitted. They relate (1) to the finding of the skull and bones of Thomas à Kempis; (2) to the decline and dissolution of the community of which he was one of the chief ornaments, viz. 'the Brothers of Common Life;' and (3) the endeavours which have been made to perpetuate the memory of his name, more particularly at Kempen, his native town, and in the city of Zwolle.

The decay and overthrow of 'the Brothers of Common Life' as a Society comes first to our notice in the order of time. We have seen how rapidly it was extended, and how many Houses were opened in various places, how many Congregations of the Brothers, and Monasteries of Canons Regular belonging to them, existed, so that the Community was in a most flourishing condition during the lifetime of Thomas à Kempis, and not only shewed great vitality, but was recognised in the country for its zeal in the advancement of learning, as well as for its influence in restoring vital Christianity. It might have been supposed to contain within it the elements of greater durability,

and to have gone on growing and taking deeper root in the land; and the more so because it had within it the elementary principles of the Reformation, and seemed to meet the yearning spirit of the times for a restoration of true and earnest religion. How then was it, that it appears to have been rather submerged, instead of being borne upwards and sustained by the rising waves of the great change which took place in Europe in the sixteenth century?

The Society was not so anxious about its own existence as it was about accomplishing the work for which it had been created, viz. the restoration of true religion in the land. The mystical character which it took was well adapted for this end, since all true religion is mystical, though all that is called mystical is not true religion. It broke in upon the deadness and formalism that followed in the wake of Scholasticism; it awakened up in men the sense of a new life, and taught them afresh how to live with God after an inward and conscious manner. 'It led the attention from works to dispositions,' says an able writer, 'from visible persons to the invisible and everlasting objects of faith, and converted the outward and legal servitude of the Church into a higher spiritual freedom, conscious of the most entire independence of all creatures. So that, upon this side, and from it no less than upon that of science, the standpoint of Christian life was introduced which we find occupied by the Reformers, and especially by Luther, who was so richly imbued with the elements of mysticism. In this view we may venture to number even the quiet *Thomas à Kempis* among the *Theologians who paved the way for the Reformation*, inasmuch as, although as a most faithful son of the Church, and as a monk ever obedient himself, and ever inculcating obedience upon others, he yet with uncommon success planted in the Church that sense of inward religion, which, by means of the Reformation, acquired importance in history.'¹ The encouragement given to the reading of the Bible, the greater freedom of

¹ Ullmann, *Reformers bef. Ref.* ii. 115, 116.

worship that was admitted, in having public prayers offered up in the mother tongue, and in preaching to the people in the same, a more liberal and general education than that which had hitherto been given by the monks, the life and soul that was infused into religious exercises, the individual access of the soul to God, and dependence upon Him for grace and salvation without the intervention of the priest or the services of the Church, though not with the view of setting these aside, but with the deep consciousness that something very much more was required even to make these effective, viz. personal repentance, conformity to the will of God, and attachment to the Saviour—all these were distinctive features in the efforts and labours of the Brothers of Common Life, and in which they differed greatly from the general character of the Churchmen of those days. And it might have been thought that such a Society would have been upheld, and gladly used as an instrument in furthering in a still greater measure the work of the coming Reformation. But it was not so.

In helping forward the latter it brought about its own dissolution ; the birth of the one was apparently the death of the other. There was another law at work, as in other instances, which counteracted the law of development and success, and the Society must succumb or disappear, as the morning star before the rising sun, or as the closed bud is lost sight of in the opening rose. The principles of the Reformation which the Brothers of Common Life had fostered and disseminated were not of such a character that they could be confined to a religious body, or only be developed through it ; they must break forth on all sides, they were to be scattered broadcast over the country, to spread as leaven among the people, to permeate all society. And therefore the work went beyond them ; it took up a wider, more practical and effective way in compassing its end ; it must not be trammelled any longer by bonds and influences which would in any wise confine and limit its operations ; hence the Society which had been the chief

means of pioneering the way for the Reformation, must dwindle away and gradually come to nothing before the more exciting, absorbing, and attractive influence of such a memorable crisis. But the Brothers of Common Life had accomplished a grand work in their day, and the fruit was beyond what they could have looked for ; and though it led to their own dissolution, they could well rejoice and willingly submit to stand on one side, as many a true servant of God has had to do, when, having fulfilled his Master's work, he becomes enfeebled, and sees the same work taken up by other hands, and carried on in other ways, probably more extensive, energetic, and effective.

But two or three of the more direct causes which led to the decline of the Brothers of Common Life should be noticed. Although they laboured to restore true piety and sincere devotion in the Church, they were very far from taking an antagonistic position to the Church, and trying to subvert it ; they waged war against its corruptions and denounced the formality, worldliness, and vice, that almost everywhere prevailed in it ; but they still regarded themselves as attached members of the Church, and sought to make it a praise in the land, to make it subservient to the Lord's work among the people, and to bring it back again to the model of its ancient simplicity and devotedness. Hence they were still reckoned good Churchmen. One of the Reformatory Councils entered the lists in their defence. Popes of great name, such as Martin V., Eugene IV., and Pius II., shewed them favour. Influential dignitaries of the Church, like Cardinal Cusa, patronised them.

In order to protect themselves against the jealousy of other religious orders who were put to shame by them, the Brothers had early placed themselves under ecclesiastical authority, and they had ever professed obedience to the powers above them. Instance their submitting to be driven from their monasteries rather than disobey the interdict. As, however, they increased in number and influence, papal ambition, ever grasping at further power and authority, sought to bring them more under its control and make

them eventually subservient to its own ends. When therefore, things were brought to a crisis by Luther, a preparatory state like theirs—embracing at one and the same time allegiance to the higher powers in the Church and the principles of the Reformation in embryo—was no longer tenable, and became the less so, the more the breach became open and irremediable. The Brothers were compelled either formally to take sides with the Papists, or to disperse themselves among those favourable to the Reformation, if not allowed quietly to die out in their Houses, as was the case in a few instances where they escaped notice.

It is true that Luther himself was in this respect very equitable, and we possess many highly remarkable statements made by him on this subject, which at the same time bear a noble testimony to the spirit of the Brotherhood, even at this advanced period. When in 1531, or at the very commencement of the ensuing year, the Council of Herford in Westphalia proposed to abolish the Sister- and Brother-houses of the place, his intercession was bespoken for the Brethren, and he keenly opposed the measure. Among other things he says, in a letter to the Burgomaster and Council, ‘Inasmuch as the Brethren and Sisters *were the first to begin the Gospel among you*, lead a creditable life, have a decent and well-behaved “congregation,” and at the same time *faithfully teach and hold the pure Word*, may I affectionately entreat your worships not to permit any dispeace or molestation to befall them, on account of their still wearing the religious dress, and observing old and laudable usages not contrary to the Gospel? For such monasteries and Brother-houses (here recognising the two-fold existence of the Society) please me beyond measure. Would to God all monastic institutions were like them! The clergy, cities, and countries would then be better served, and more prosperous than they now are.’¹ To the same effect Luther expresses himself to the Rectors of the Brother-houses, Jacob Montanus of Spire, and Gerard Viscampius of Xantes. ‘I dare not indulge,’ he says, ‘great

¹ De Wette, January 31, 1532, No. 1432, s. 333.

wishes ; but if all other things were in as good condition as the Brother-houses, the Church would be much too blessed even in this present life. Your dress and other commendable usages do not injure the Gospel, but are rather of advantage to it, assailed as it is in these days by the reckless and unbridled spirits who know only how to destroy, but not to build up.' ¹

At a somewhat later date, Luther, in his own and Melanchthon's name, again delivers the same sentiments in a letter to the College of the Nine-men at Herford, and to the Brethren themselves, to whom, in order to take away all ground for evil-speaking, he returned, with an expression of thanks, the two gold pieces which they had sent him. And in the year 1534 he a third time interposed for these Brethren, urgently reiterating his solicitation, that they should not be troubled or molested, and again bestowing the highest commendations upon the Institute, 'because, under the liberty and grace of Christ, they had charitably ministered and been useful to many.' ²

But notwithstanding these just and beautiful sentiments of Luther, which shew how the current opinion was running at this period, the nature of the case was such that, as the Reformation progressed, the Brethren must choose one or other of the two sides. The Papal party, it is well known, gained the ascendancy over those who would rule the Church by General Councils, and consequently resolutely strove to bring all they could wholly under their sway. The Reforming party also felt on their side that no half-measures would do ; all efforts at reform within the Church, however vigorous and sincere they had been, had failed, through the intrigue and domination of the Church of Rome, and there seemed a determination in every direction, that no quarter or toleration should be given to those who in any wise yielded submission to the Papal party who opposed them.

¹ 'Contra furiosos et licentiosos et indisciplinatos spiritus, qui hodie nihil nisi destruere et nihil ædificare didicerunt.' De Wette, in letter—334, which immediately follows.

² *Ibid.* two letters,—Nos. 1606 and 1607, ss. 560-562.

Even if the Reformers had not forced the Brothers of Common Life to decide and range themselves on one side or the other, the Order of Jesuits especially, which came into existence about this time, must have done so. Hence we see that part of the Brethren embraced the Reformation movement, threw their influence into the scale, and became an essential element in it,¹ a step which sooner or later led to their dissolution; whilst others of the Brethren, wishing to live in peace, were obliged to yield to the Jesuits, who partly expelled them from their establishments, and partly compelled them to embrace the usual monastic discipline, and thereby renounce their peculiar characteristics.² In this issue, however, nothing was essentially lost, for all the good at which the Brethren aimed had been transferred into the general civilisation of the age, and the spirit of Apostolical, free, earnest, popular, and practical piety, as Ullmann observes, had found representatives, who far excelled Gerard, Florentius, and Thomas. 'It had formed,' he adds, 'a society which rose above the narrow limits of a Brother-house to the liberty, height, and comprehensiveness of a Church.'³

It will be remembered also, that the main occupation of the Brothers, and whereby they chiefly maintained themselves, since they were not allowed to go about the country begging, was the copying books. But on the invention of *Printing* and its subsequent extension, which effected the object with so much greater speed and economy, this occupation lost all its importance, and to a great extent took away the means of supporting themselves. And the effect ensued with all the more certainty, that the new invention, in the first stages of its progress, was vigorously applied to the same objects, as those on which the Brethren had hitherto exercised their active pens—viz. the Sacred Scriptures, works on theology, devotion, and school-books. In many instances, however, the Brethren at once availed themselves of the new invention. 'While

¹ Delprat, ss. 78, 79, 91.

² *Ibid.* ss. 73, 76, 91.

³ *Reformers before the Reformation*, p. 177.

the presses of Gutenberg—who invented the movable metallic types—Faust and Schœffer, in Mayence and Ethwill, were working with ever-increasing success, the Brethren in Maryvale, near Geissenheim in the Rhinegau, who had hitherto done little else than copy books, procured for themselves also a printing-press, probably as early as 1468, but certainly about 1474.¹ In like manner printing offices were set up in the Brother-houses at Herzogenbusch, Gouda, Louvain, Rostock, and Convent-Hem, near Schoonhoven.²

That the Brothers of Common Life early sought the aid of this wonderful instrument for the diffusion of knowledge seems amply corroborated by the statement of a modern writer, who says, ‘Among the most valuable volumes to be found in the *incunabula* of German libraries, the Canons of Windesheim have their full share.’³

But the new art soon spread so mightily over all civilized countries, that the most which the Brethren with their slender means could accomplish, was comparatively trifling. Hitherto, as transcribers, they had enjoyed almost a monopoly of gain. Now they were lost like a drop in the mighty flood, which in the 16th century had already swelled to such a height.⁴

The Brothers of Common Life had met with great success also in the *education of the young*. They founded, as we have shewn, many schools, where previously there had been none. And by the substitution of a better instruction they had supplanted to a large extent that of the monks. They had assisted many youths of ability, and trained not a few to become excellent teachers. In this respect also, however, they were in a manner superseded by the progress of general knowledge. Their best scholars, on attaining to manhood, like Alexander Hegius,

¹ Schaab, *Erfindung der Buchdruckerkunst*, Mainz, 1831. Th. iii. s. 358.

² Delprat, ss. 49, 52, 54, 70, 77, 85, 144. Jodocus Badius Ascensius, who wrote a Life of Thomas à Kempis, was one of the earliest and most eminent of the printers, who reaped great merit from his excellent editions of ancient classics; he had been educated by the Brothers.

³ Neale, *Jansenist Church of Holland*, p. 100.

⁴ Ullmann, *Ref. bef. Ref.*, p. 175.

Herman von Busche, Louis Drinkenberg, and others, set up schools of their own. And as in these institutions the circle of polite learning was made to embrace a wider range and greater variety, than was the case among the Brethren—who still, in comparison, occupied a somewhat narrow and ascetically restricted position—they soon attracted all the best talent, whilst the schools of the Brethren were more and more forsaken.¹

Thus we see how various causes more immediately contributed to the decline of the Brothers of Common Life. The Society gradually disappeared, making its exit with becoming honour; and deeply respected by the great men of the age, it yielded to the new religious and intellectual development and fervour which it had been instrumental in kindling. Other hands took up the work, which it step by step resigned; it had fulfilled its mission, and run its course, as the waters of some fertilizing stream which had now reached the ocean, and, no longer confined within narrow limits, had entered upon a wide expanse, with a boundless range, bearing upon its bosom the enterprize and the riches of numberless minds. The last Brother-house was erected at Cambray in 1505, but it went down at no later date than 1554. In 1579 only three students were boarded for 32–33 gold guilders, in the once so celebrated House at Zwolle. In 1575, Henry Arsenius, the last member of the Brother-house, died at Rostock, a man of piety and classical education, and universally respected, in whom, as in a fine portrait, the spirit of the Brotherhood, before it sank into the grave, was once more displayed.²

It only remains to add concerning the fate of the Abbey of St. Agnes, that in the year 1559, the revenues were handed over by Pope Paul IV., and Philip of Spain, for the endowment of the newly established Bishopric of Deventer. The first bishop belonged to the order of St. Francis, Agidius de Monte by name, a native of Brabant. He took

¹ *Ullmann, Ref. bef. Ref.* p. 174.

² *Delprat*, 71, 36; and *Mohnike zu Delprat*, No. 4, 172, and citation.

possession of his bishopric in 1570, but in the same year he had to resign it, as he was a faithful adherent of Philip's, and of the Roman Catholic faith, which entirely lost ground in the country. As he foresaw the speedy dissolution of the Abbey of St. Agnes, he carried away with him, as a precious relic, the Bible, beautifully written by Thomas à Kempis. It was later on carefully preserved in four large folios in the Monastery of the Sacred Body at Cologne.

Soon after this, in 1573, the monks remaining at Mount St. Agnes were all driven away by the troops of Count William of Heerenberg, who was fighting against the Spaniards; and when the States-General, assembled at the Hague, had solemnly renounced their allegiance to King Philip in 1581, the ruined Abbey, with its fiefs and tithes, was handed over to the exchequer of the Province of Overijssel. Heribert Rosweidus states that in his time the hill on which the Abbey once stood, where Thomas had spent his pious life, was called 'the miracle mount' by the country people; and that it was constantly visited by pilgrims barefooted, in honour of this holy man. Two large stones formerly marked the resting-place of Thomas à Kempis when his bones were disinterred, but they are now no longer visible or to be traced. More recent testimony states that the hill where the Abbey stood was turned into a pleasure garden; but many pious people still love to wander here, and to the Churchyard of the Bergskloster, to meditate on Thomas à Kempis, and his sayings.¹

I now proceed to take up another of the subjects, which presents much interest. *The discovery of the bones and skull of Thomas à Kempis* happened soon after the dissolution of the Monastery at Mount St. Agnes. When I paid a visit to the city of Zwolle in the autumn of 1875, the gentleman to whom I brought an introduction, Mr. Th. F. van Riemsdijk, who was much interested in my inquiry about Thomas à Kempis, and who had but recently read some German publications about him, informed me

¹ Mooren, *Nachrichten über T. à K.*

among other things that there were some relics of the venerable and saintly man deposited in one of the churches ; ' but,' continued he, ' though I have been several years in Zwolle, and have asked to have them shewn to me, I have never been able to get a sight of them, because the key of the coffer has been lost.' After further conversation he added, ' Since you have come so far, we will, however, make another effort to see them.' Upon this he kindly accompanied me to the church, and having made application to the sacristan, we got a similar answer, that we could not possibly see them, since the key had not been forthcoming for more than three years, and the coffer could not be opened. Mr. van Riemsdijk interceded much for me with the man, and told him that I had come a long distance to see all that could possibly be found out relative to Thomas à Kempis. At last he said, ' I will see what can be done, and send word to your hotel to let you know whether the relics can be seen.' With this we were content to wait.

In the evening, on my return from Agnietenberg, the site of Mount St. Agnes, I found a message had been sent by the sacristan, that if I would call at the church in the morning, he would contrive that we should see the relics of Thomas à Kempis. My friend also called upon me, and we made arrangements to meet and go to the church together the next day at nine o'clock. I was glad to have the company of Mr. Riemsdijk, since speaking English fairly, he acted as an interpreter, besides being very agreeable and intelligent. The next day, however, was market-day, and as we passed through the market-place to the church, a very busy and lively scene presented itself. Women with their butter and eggs and poultry from the country were standing with their baskets, and seemed to find a ready sale, and so also did those who were selling vegetables and fruits, whilst clothes and shoes and various kinds of ware were exposed, and all seemed intent upon doing business, while customers in abundance were not wanting. When we got to the church we found

that mass was being celebrated ; and though it was market-day, and a very busy time, there must have been from three to four hundred persons present, and rarely have I beheld a more earnest and devout congregation. Many of those present had evidently been to market and finished their business, for numbers of baskets were left at the lower end of the church.

When the service was over we went to the vestry at the back of the church and were admitted by the sacristan, and here, on a shelf above one of the doors, we noticed a coffer about a yard and a half long, and more than a foot and a quarter deep, with this inscription painted on it within a gilded scroll, *RELIQUIÆ PII THOMAE KEMPIS*. A short ladder was brought, and we were invited to mount and inspect the remains ; and here we saw the thigh and arm bones lying together, and a round box, about a foot in diameter, wherein the skull was placed ; this was brought down and placed on the table, while the other bones were not disturbed ; and, the skull being lifted out, it was very tenderly, reverently, and affectionately regarded. Here was the receptacle of the brain and thinking faculties of that pious man who wrote the books of the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*,’ and who was such an ardent lover and follower of our Blessed Lord. This was a very solemn and privileged moment when I felt that I had been brought very near to him outwardly, when I could both see and touch his earthly remains. In a smaller box still there were several lesser bones, and two or three other things to which allusion will shortly be made. No repulsive feelings stirred within one on beholding them, but rather a happy and sacred awe seemed to steal over me, for were they not the hallowed remains of one of the dearest saints of God, and whose memory was sweetly cherished by the whole Church throughout the world ? After gazing upon them for some time we saw all carefully and becomingly put away again ; and my only regret was that these relics of Thomas were not placed in some other resting-place than on a shelf—in some place where a fitting memorial might be raised over

them, since signs of decay in the crumbling of the edges of the bones began to appear; otherwise they seemed to be in good preservation, and fairly guarded. We could not help observing, in the fine, broad, high, and fully developed skull, what an agreement there seemed to be with the likeness of Thomas, which we had but lately seen at the 'Pastoor's' house.

Before leaving I inquired, how it was known that these *were* the remains of Thomas à Kempis. Might they not be the bones of someone else? I said. But the sacristan replied that they had been duly verified by competent authority; and showed us an account, in a small publication of fourteen pages, of the finding of them more than two hundred years ago, and how it had been ascertained that they belonged to Thomas. I procured a copy of this little work, which was in Dutch, hoping to learn more about the matter at my leisure. On leaving Zwolle I felt that the object of my visit to the place with which Thomas was so closely associated was more fully accomplished than I could have expected, and that I was amply repaid for any trouble; for probably I was the only Englishman who had ever seen the remains of à Kempis.

In the following account the reader will find the substance of what is contained in the little pamphlet respecting the discovery and removal of the skull and bones of Thomas à Kempis, from the burial grounds of Mount St. Agnes, together with other particulars, most of which are supplied by Professor Mooren.

The earthly remains of Thomas à Kempis had rested for two hundred years among his Brethren, beneath the ruins of the monastery, in the still bosom of the earth at Mount St. Agnes, when Max Heinrich, Elector of Cologne, felt impelled to disturb the repose of his grave by taking up his bones. He was doubtless afraid that in the existing state of affairs the sacrilegious spirit of plunder would lead to the violation of his remains. Reverently to open the grave of such a man, then, was far better than to leave it to the chances of desecration and despoliation.

What Isabella Eugenie, Infanta of Spain, had failed to accomplish, Max Heinrich had obtained through the victories of a powerful ally. This prince of the Church had entered into an unfortunate alliance with Louis XIV. of France, in order to wrest from the Dutch the frontier fortress of Rheinberg, which they refused to yield to him in defiance of the treaty of peace. The events of war, which began favourably, led the French and the Elector with them through Holland to the town of Zwolle. Here he made inquiries concerning the resting-place of Thomas à Kempis, in the year 1672. Mysterious tales and traditions, according to the statement of the Protestants, as to the spot where he was laid lingered among the few Roman Catholic people. It was known from the Chronicles of St. Agnes that Thomas à Kempis must have been buried at the eastern end of the cloister. Moreover the Roman Catholic Vicar of Zwolle, Arnold Waeger, had heard from his predecessor in office, who had laboured in the place forty-four years, and had only been dead ten years before the time we are treating of, that between the grave of Thomas and the door which opened from the choir into the cloister there had been a space of seven feet left. As his former Vicar must have lived in the previous generation, he might have been acquainted with some of the old inhabitants of the ruined Abbey, who gave him this information. The search, however, was begun; and after three weeks had been spent in digging up the rubbish, and when at last the foundations of the Church and cloisters had been laid bare, Waeger could stand upon the spot underneath which rested the remains of Thomas, and say to the workmen, 'If you do not find him here, you will find him nowhere.' This took place on August 1, 1672. Search was accordingly made there, and the result was successful.

From the details handed down to us of the disinterment, there seems not to be the slightest doubt as to the genuineness of the opened grave, and the remains discovered therein being those of Thomas à Kempis. When

the lid of the coffin was taken off, the bones there were still attached to each other, and had apparently been undisturbed since his body had been laid there by his sorrowing Brethren in 1471. The head rested on two pieces of turf, and the hands were crossed. The ribs and shoulder bones were destroyed, but a small piece of his stole could still be seen. The bones of his left foot were covered with lichen, which, as it resembled yellow, white and pink flowers, was regarded by some enthusiastic admirers as a miracle. On August 3, the bones with the skull and whatever else was found in the coffin, were carefully taken out, wrapped in white linen, and carried in triumph to Zwolle. The Elector kept the precious relics until the following day in the house of the judge Zwenhuysen, where he was staying, and then delivered them by the hands of his Commissary, Von Mering, a Canon of Cologne, to Pastor Waeger, in order that he might reverently preserve them in his private chapel dedicated to St. Joseph. He also commanded him to have a shrine made at the Elector's expense: and two years after Waeger placed within this reliquary the bones of Thomas, and all that appertained to them, on the Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul.

The good Pastor Waeger, however, found the same trouble attached to his treasure as rich people do with their money. Others wanted to relieve him of it. He had scarcely gained possession of it when his anxieties and difficulties began. He was pressed to give it up, partly by the ecclesiastical authorities at Cologne, and partly by those of Brabant. On the part of those of Cologne it was urged that there would be more security for these precious relics if they had the charge of them; and on behalf of the latter, that it seemed more fair and becoming that they should be in the possession and keeping of his own Order, which still lingered in this country, though greatly reduced. Fortunately Waeger would not listen to either, and kept the sacred charge committed to his care with the well-known tenacity of his nation. Not any portion of the

treasure was taken away so long as he lived ; but after his decease, in April 1692, his successor did not seem to share his views concerning it ; and if we can trust the report of one of the clergy of Zwolle, Herr von Kessel, who wrote to Mooren about twenty-six years ago, several of the bones disappeared. In his letter he writes, ' I heard about thirty years ago that a Doctor of Medicine declared, after examining the remains, that only the bones of the left side were still there ; and what had happened to those of the right side no one could tell. A few years before this, a piece of the jaw bone, containing three teeth, was taken out of the shrine, as the following memorandum found therein will testify : ' *Ego infrascriptus monachus professus e Congregatione Gallica Ord. S. Benedicti attestor accepisse a Rev^{do} Do. Tempelmann partem ossium pii servi Christi Thomæ à Kempis, maxillam nempe tribus dentibus inbutam, in Abbatia nostra Solesmensi tuto et pie perenniterque asservendam. Testor I. A. Dom. Pietra Ord. S. Bened. Zwollæ, 18 Sept. 1847.*'

In the same letter the writer gives an account of the contents in the Reliquary as it then was, and now is. ' The bones of the left side are still to be seen, also the whole head, half of the lower jaw with one tooth, the vertebra, some pieces of clay with which the coffin had been covered, some pieces of turf on which the head had rested, some chalk, the stems of the flowers (lichens), which had blossomed from the left foot, a fragment of the stole, and the bones of the right hand. The larger bones lay in the coffin. The head was preserved in a separate box, the right hand in a little pinewood case ; the tiny stems, and a piece of the stole were wrapped in separate paper parcels, and all the rest were preserved in a small square oak box within the shrine. The shrine is a wooden chest, without doubt the same as the one made at the expense of the Archbishop of Cologne and the Elector Max Heinrich. The length of it is 93 inches, the breadth about 37, and the height 40 inches by Amsterdam measurement. The shape is four square with a pointed lid ; the sides and front part

are ornamented with carved cherub heads and foliage. On the front a twisted scroll is to be seen, bearing the Latin inscription, "*Reliquiæ pii Thomæ Kempis.*" The chest is painted blue, the cherubs a flesh colour, and the foliage work is gilded. The shrine is securely fastened, and the pastor carefully keeps the key thereof. Until 1809 it remained in St. Joseph's Chapel in Spiegel-steege (a street).

'But when this chapel was pulled down, owing to its state of decay, the shrine was removed to St. Michael's Church in the Neustrasse. Here it occupies the same position as it did in its former resting-place; it stands by the wall, or rather is affixed to it on the Gospel side of the chancel, and therefore can be seen the whole length of the Church.¹ But I can well believe that the greater part of the worshippers do not even know that it contains the bones of Thomas à Kempis. These relics are not exhibited for any public adoration, and none, as far as I know, is offered in private. I was born in this city, and am now sixty years of age, thirty-six of which I have been employed in my spiritual calling, and yet I have never seen the slightest worship paid to these remains. But I well remember having heard from my predecessor Mülder, during the time that I acted as his chaplain, that once in his recollection a preacher of the Mennonite fraternity had spoken with the greatest reverence of Thomas à Kempis before a distinguished assembly, and had declared that it was high time that a public monument should be raised to his memory in the city burying ground, since he had died and

¹ My impression is that the remains of Thomas à Kempis are deposited in the church of Notre Dame, belonging to the Roman Catholics, not in St. Michael's. And when I saw them they were not in the chancel, but in the vestry, and could not be seen by the people in the church.

Since writing this note, and while these latter pages were passing through the press, I have received a letter from Mr. Van Doorninch, who confirms the impression I had, and the note I had made on my visit to Zwolle, for he says, 'The bones of the great "*Windesheimer*" are still in the Catholic Church of St. Mary (Notre Dame).' It is evident, therefore, that some changes have been made since the year 1847; not only as to the place where the remains rest, but in the doing away with the shrine.

been buried in the parish. But since that time the subject had been suffered to drop.' ¹

One or two remarks should here be made for the better information of the reader. The Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, which obtained a portion of the remains of à Kempis, is reputed to have set the tone to a wide religious circle throughout the whole of France : and this chiefly owing to the influence of the worthy Abbot Guaranger, renowned for his scientific labours in the cause of Liturgical and Ecclesiastical Archæology. Hence it can readily be understood what significance would be attached to the possession of such a relic of Thomas à Kempis's bones as they had lately obtained. Truly this homage could only have been offered to one whom they regarded as the author of the 'De Imitatione Christi' ! And this is the more singular, because it must be remembered that this Order of Benedictine monks was in the front rank of those who denied to Thomas the authorship of this work. For if they had still continued to see in him only a diligent copyist, a pious monk, and the author of some but little known works of devotion, they would hardly have set such store by his relics. Who does not perceive here a change of opinion, if not even an atonement for past injustice ? ² Further, it is said that this man, who was the prime mover of more enlightened sentiments, of which the Benedictine monastery at Solesmes was the centre, was the representative of views more in accordance with the Reformed Church, and had an abhorrence of any pictures for worship, or of the worship of relics ; and yet it is remarkable that he should hold in peculiar reverence and honour the remains of Thomas à Kempis, and feel it a favour to possess a portion of them. It expresses his admiration of the man, and to some degree his agreement with the pious sentiments of the saintly author. Lastly, we must not rashly accuse the people of Zwolle of not knowing what a treasure they possess, or the guardians thereof as negligent of their trust, because

¹ Mooren, *Nachrichten über Tho. à Kempis*, pp. 206-210.

² *Ibid.* 210, 211.

no superstitious reverence is paid to the remains of Thomas which they possess: for although that section of the people to whom they belong are Roman Catholics, and it may be that the authorities have for certain reasons no desire to bring the name of Thomas too prominently forward as a saint in the Church of God; yet it is hoped that this comparative privacy in which they are kept, is from a higher regard that the remains of Thomas may rest in peace, and that they hold it more necessary to pay greater attention to the truths and practice of religion, than to give any idolatrous reverence to the perishable relics of even so devout and holy a man.

It is a matter of much regret that some memorial of Thomas à Kempis has not yet been raised at the place on which his name has shed such a lustre, and which but for him would have otherwise been little known. A hope was entertained a short while ago that a splendid new church might be erected on that hill where he spent his days in such peaceful devotion, and wrote his many valuable books of spiritual instruction under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and that there again his mortal remains might find once more a worthy resting-place, in or near the spot where they were first interred, so that his many admirers might flock thither and pay a tribute of respect to his memory. Since, however, there seems no prospect of such a memorial to this sainted man being taken up and carried out, I have but lately suggested through my friend, that the authorities should raise some other suitable monumental structure on the place where his remains once rested, and that they should again be deposited there; and to encourage the project have offered, not only to subscribe for this purpose, if the proposed memorial should be satisfactory, but to solicit further subscriptions for this object in England. Only last year (November 1880) I received a letter from Mr. van Door-
ninch, Archivist of Overijssel, stating that he had only lately had a conversation with the Rev. O. A. Spitzen, and Mr. Rysterbos, respecting raising some public memorial to Thomas à Kempis, to be placed in one of the cemeteries,

or on the site where the Convent of St. Agnes once stood : and that they had a design after awhile to make an appeal for this to men of all dogmas. On this matter, however, he said he would write to me again.¹

And now it is only just and becoming to notice, before concluding these Memorials, a few tributes of respect and veneration which have been paid to the memory of this truly great and good man since he died. When Cardinal Fabius Chisi, who afterwards became Pope under the name of Alexander VII., in 1655, was living at Cologne as Nuncio to the Rhine Provinces, he held Thomas à Kempis in such peculiar honour that he caused a picture of him to be painted for him in Zwolle ; and further promised that he would undertake his canonization, if only he could discover his bones.² When, however, they were discovered in 1672, he was no longer living, and another Pope ruled, who knew not Thomas, or if he did, did not feel that enthusiasm for his name that his predecessor had done.

Before this time also, in the year 1629, it is said that the citizens of his native town (Kempen) strove to do some honour to one of whom they might be justly proud. John Wilmius records in his history of this place, ' This year we have caused three pictures of our countryman, Thomas à Kempis, to be executed at Cologne, in order to do honour to the memory of so great a man. One of them hangs in the Castle, one in the Town-hall (Rathhaus), and the third in the Parish Church. The total cost amounted to eighty Reichsthalers. The artist was Franz Kessler by name.'³ Nothing is said as to whether the artist made use of the authenticated painting at Zwolle, or a copy of the same, or whether they were entirely from his imagination. Two of these pictures, Mooren says, are still to be seen. One

¹ In a letter I received from Mr. van Doorninch, dated November 18, 1881, he says, 'The question of a monument for Thomas is still what it was a year ago. The best monument to erect is a work to vindicate his right to the authorship of the *Imitation*. But sympathy for something in iron or stone exists not, or rather is not general enough to give the hope of good success.'

² J. Brewer, *Tho. à Kemp. Biographia*, p. 66.

³ Chap. xxi.

represents him in a sitting posture, the other as kneeling. The one which is lost portrayed him standing. Thus the three portraits of him were quite different.

The last one, which belonged to the Electoral Castle, perished when the town was attacked and carried by storm, when the French, Hessian, and Weimar troops came against it in 1642. At the same time, a smaller picture by another artist was destroyed, which hung in a vaulted passage leading from the market to the church, underneath the town-hall. The painting in the church was formerly hung in the choir, and later on for thirty years in the entrance to the sacristy, until the time when the church was restored. When in the last century the dilapidated Town-hall was pulled down, the meetings of the magistrates were transferred to the Castle, and one of the chambers was used as a depository for the sheriff's archives. Here the portrait of Thomas, which formerly hung in the town-hall, was also brought.

After the entrance of the Allies, in 1814, the military authorities wished to turn the Castle into a hospital for the wounded, and the then proprietor, H. Peter von Lövenich of Crefeld, made great alterations in the buildings. The portrait of Thomas which had come into his possession with the Castle, he sent to his estate, Bockdorp. From the description given of this painting, it is conjectured that it must be the one from which the coloured picture, which I saw at the *auberge* at Agnietenberg, was taken, a copy of which has been placed at the commencement of the second volume; for it states that 'Thomas is seen sitting on a hill slope in the dress of his Order. He has two open books before him; an ink bottle and pen are beside them. He is reading a book with the title "Liber Ecclesiasticus." The other book has a picture of the crucified Jesus on the right-hand page, and on the left we read the words, "De Imitatione Christi libri quatuor." On his left hand bloom two lovely flowers on the ground, viz. a rose and a lily, and beside them a withered branch. As a background we see on the left hand the Church of St. Agnes and a part

of the Monastery, on the right the town of Zwolle and the distant country.' This picture, we are further told, was reproduced as a very successful engraving by H. Anton Ferlings, a drawing-master of the Gymnasium at Kempen, about forty-five years ago.¹ Some details are given of other portraits at Kempen; but, without giving any description of them, it may be remarked that the inhabitants of his native town were not unmindful of his memory, and loved to gaze upon what they regarded as the features of one who belonged to them, and had been justly honoured and revered throughout the Christian world.

So far back as the year 1632 the magistrates caused search to be made in the archives of the town, respecting the house where Thomas was born, but it proved fruitless. That made in 1657 was more successful. The legal document was found containing the details of the sale by the Hemerken brothers of their father's house, some allusion to which has been given in one of the earlier chapters.

The most important memorial, however, which his fellow-citizens raised to the memory of Thomas à Kempis in his native town, was unquestionably the founding of the Gymnasium. Whether the old tradition still lingered in their minds that the site of some of its buildings was identical with the paternal home of Thomas, or it was merely out of respect to his memory, it is not known, but in their enthusiasm for him the Gymnasium received the name of *Josephino-Thomæum*. St. Joseph, being regarded as the patron saint of Christian children, was thereby held in honour, but had to share it with Thomas in the designation given to the new institution. It was founded in 1662, i.e. ten years before the bones of Thomas à Kempis were discovered; and, according to the custom of those times, the students acted the Life of Thomas à Kempis on the stage, at the end of the first year. The piece was composed by H. Reek, one of the founders and first rectors of the school, and printed. It is much to be regretted that a copy of it is no longer extant. There would certainly

¹ J. Brewer, *Biographia Thom. à Kemp.*, p. 105.

have been references in this play to the scenes of his early childhood, and other incidents mentioned connecting him with Kempen.¹ The name given to the Gymnasium belonged to it till later times, when its organization and whole plan had to be remodelled. The endowment was very scanty, and its arrangements most simple, but its influence most beneficial. The supervision or government of it was incorporated with St. John's Benefice. The head master, on consideration of his drawing a small stipend from some foundations, and a supplement from the privy purse of the State, had to support five professors who had free lodging at the Gymnasium. These professors received small sums from the scholars as school-money, as well as birthday and New Year presents; but on their part have each to instruct one scholar free of charge, who is called their 'Famulus.'

For many of these particulars I am indebted to Mooren's work. But in a letter I received from Dr. Gross of Kempen, he speaks of 'the present Thomæum Gymnasium' as distinct from the Gymnasium of the town; and states that the seal of the former, which was struck in the year of its foundation, represents Thomas kneeling before the Virgin Mary. The latter-named Gymnasium, of which he kindly sent me a photograph, a copy of which is attached to the first volume, has in the main been rebuilt on the site of the old Castle of Kempen, the foundation of which was laid in the year Thomas was born (1380). The *three towers* are unaltered, but the rest of the building was burnt down, and then afterwards restored for its present purpose. Thus it appears that the old Gymnasium, established in memory of à Kempis, still exists, and is probably on or near the site of old Hemerken's house. The other Gymnasium is a higher class school, and most likely thrusts the old one into the shade: and is endowed or supported in some measure by the public purse; as from another account, it is stated incidentally that the Emperor Napoleon made over as a gift, and substituted an old Franciscan convent, for the schools of the town, still leaving the old Gymnasium

¹ Mooren, *Nachrichten*, p. 187.

as it was. Since then the town Gymnasium has been transferred to the site of the ancient castle, as noticed above.

Another memorial raised to Thomas à Kempis by his native city is the so-called 'Thomas-Foundation.' The first idea of it occurred to the pro-director of the Gymnasium, Joseph Bister, who died July 12, 1844. He was always a great admirer of his countryman, and the citizens have to thank him for a highly successful translation of the four books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' All those with whom he discussed his plan, agreed with him, that there was all the more need to perpetuate the memory of Thomas in his native town, since the present high school did not now bear his name. It was not easy to decide what form their memorial should take. Some wished to have a fitting inscription placed on a bronze statue of him, which should stand in the open place between the market and the church. Others again desired to erect a home for orphans, old men, or sick people, to be called after him. And the latter plan found favour with the majority of those who had to decide. The support which they received, however, came short of their expectations, and they had to be content with a smaller establishment than they had at first designed.¹

Mention also should here be made of an appropriate means which one of the late Queens of Holland made use of to honour the memory of Thomas, and to remind others of his good name and works. Whenever she heard of a truly virtuous wedded pair, who were about to celebrate their golden wedding-day, in addition to her good wishes for their happiness, she presented them with a handsome copy of the four books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.'²

A splendid memorial of Thomas, says Mooren, in the shape of his own works, is undoubtedly the Büllingen Collection at the Cologne Municipal Library. Louis von Büllingen, formerly a member of the Imperial Abbey Cornelimünster at Aix-la-Chapelle, was born at the princely estate of Rath, near Kempen: he was a diligent antiquary, and collected, with the industry peculiar to the Benedictines,

¹ Mooren, *Nachrichten*, pp. 191, 192.

² *Ibid.* 191, 192.

to whose order he belonged, more than 400 copies of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' some of them rare specimens ; which he bequeathed to the City of Cologne by his will dated November 17, 1838.¹

It may be well also to notice here, that in the year 1841 a magnificent polyglot edition of the four books of the 'De Imitatione Christi' was published at Lyons, written in French, English, Greek, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese (cost 60 francs).

But to turn to a more recent acknowledgment of this truly great and good man.

Dr. Gross, the head-master of the town Gymnasium informs me that a Centenary Fête in honour of the sainted Thomas à Kempis took place at Kempen on August 11, 1880, when the members of the Historical Association of the Lower Rhine held a festive gathering, in which a large number of the burghers took part. He forwarded to me also an account of it, in the 33rd number of the 'Wochenblatt,' from which I draw the following particulars :—

'The congress of the Historical Association of the Lower Rhine, which took place on Wednesday, at the Hotel Pont Pontzen, had a special interest for us, because a discussion took place with reference to Thomas à Kempis, Kempen's greatest and noblest son. The town was gaily decorated at the instance of the Burgomaster ; and in the absence of the President of the Association, Dr. Mooren of Wachtendonk, who is now quite blind, the Vice-President, Professor Floss of Bonn, opened the congress, heartily welcoming those present, and expressing his pleasure at seeing such a good attendance.'

He then made reference to Kempen being the birth-place of Thomas à Kempis, and to his ascetic life. Many attempts, continued Professor Floss, are being made to rob Thomas of the authorship of the 'Imitation of Christ,' on grounds which are not reliable. He had left a memorial of himself better than one of bronze or stone, but posterity had a duty to perform in erecting a monument to his memory ; and this, he said, could be best accom-

¹ Mooren, *Nachrichten*, pp. 181, 182.

plished by an exhaustive treatise to settle the questions about the authorship ; and ought not the town of Kempen to feel itself bound to contribute towards such a memorial in behalf of her immortal son, and thus clear up all doubts as to the authorship of these four books ? A contribution of three to four hundred marks would be sufficient to enable a thoroughly learned work on this subject to be taken in hand, which could be completed in two years' time. The Historical Association would do the rest, and undertake the circulation of the book ; and then concluded with these words, ' Let us honour our fore-fathers, and we honour ourselves ! '

Then the Burgomaster, Herr Plum, welcomed the Association in the name of the town, drawing attention to the flags and other demonstrations ; and expressed his gratification that it had assembled in Kempen, the birth-place of Thomas, on the occasion of the *fifth centenary* commemoration of the birth of that great man. He would lay the proposal of the learned chairman before the town council, and he hoped that his colleagues would not reject it.

Dr. Gross gave a comprehensive sketch of the life of Thomas, and proved from his writings his distinguished learning and great piety. A centenary commemoration was a grand historical acknowledgment, and at the same time an act of gratitude, which in the first instance was due to the man from whose writings posterity had drawn largely of culture, deep teaching, steadfast faith, and the perfection of moral purity, which had respect to the Author of all good. Dr. Gross then entered upon a defence of à Kempis being the author of the ' *De Imitatione Christi* ; ' and observed, that the very existence in history of the only man, Abbot Gersen, whose name with any right could be set up against that of our Thomas, has not yet been proved ; and the most recent work in his favour, that of the Benedictine Wolfsgruber, has been crushed by determined opposition ; and concluded by saying, that the adornment of the town, and the warm sympathy shewn in the day's proceedings, proved that his native town preserved a grateful recollec-

tion of him, faithfully demonstrated throughout so many centuries.

The Reverend Hertkins of Viersen spoke very eloquently of the great poetical gifts and zeal of Thomas, and recited several extracts from his religious poems, which he had translated from the original Latin text; his rich musical voice adding to the depth and beauty of the thoughts expressed.

Herr Oberst, a D. von Schauenberg of Düsseldorf, gave a comprehensive sketch of certain episodes in the Thirty Years' War, which related to the immediate neighbourhood, especially the battle of Hückelsmey, and the consequent severe siege of Kempen.

Herr Lempertz entered into business details, and spoke of various editions of the 'Imitation of Christ.' He also reminded his hearers of the later severe sieges which Kempen had sustained in 1671 and 1672.

Herr Heinrich, Chaplain of Wachterdonk, editor of the Lower Rhine '*Geschichtsfreundes*,' entered upon a lengthy description of the campaign of William of Orange in 1572, and some other circumstances connected with the neighbourhood.

The Vice-President of the Association then moved for an inquiry to be made into the site of a piece of land between the Engel-gate and the Selder, not far from the old Hülserweg, which was in the possession of the family of Thomas à Kempis.

It is pleasing to learn what has been done on the Continent, and to notice the endeavours made by his countrymen to honour and perpetuate the memory of the saintly author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*.' It shews how much they admire him and revere his name; and may we not take it as an indication that not a few have profited by his writings, and are in some measure animated by his spirit, in striving like him to be followers of Christ? And in concluding these memorials of THOMAS À KEMPIS AND THE BROTHERS OF COMMON LIFE, associated with him, I would express an ardent hope that a better acquaintance with the deep, earnest, holy piety exhibited in their lives and works, which it has been my desire to

bring into more prominent light, may serve, by God's blessing, to lead many souls to greater diligence in following the blessed footsteps of Christ's most holy Life ; and, from beholding Him their Lord and Master more, and loving Him more also, they may be changed into His image from glory to glory, till they come at last to be with Him, where He is; and with all His saints and à Kempis with them, to behold the majesty of that glory which He had with the Father, before the world began. Amen.

THOMAS A KEMPIS,
Canonic. Regular. Ord. S. Augustini.



**Natus circa An.1380. Denatus An.
 1471. Elevatus An.1672.**

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